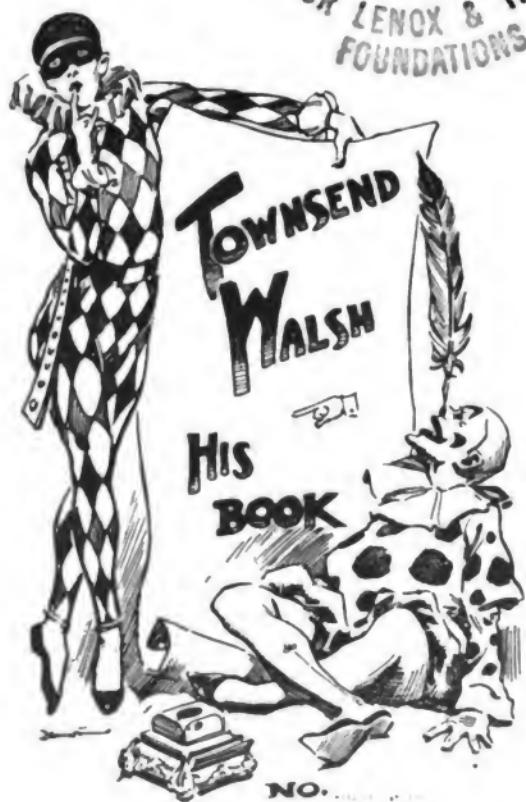


Robert Mantell's romance

Clarence Joseph
Bulliet

THE NEW
ASTOR LENOX & TILDEN
FOUNDATIONS



To my good friend.
Townsend Walsh.
with Compliments.
O. J. Russell
New York, April 5, 1920.

Robert Mantell's Romance

By C. J. BULLIET

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

R

L



"ROBERT MANTELL'S ROMANCE"
Mr. Mantell and Miss Hamper

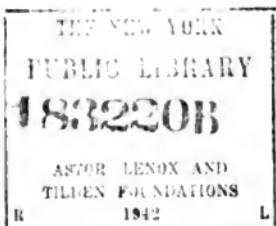
ROBERT MANTELL'S ROMANCE

By C. J. BULLIET

BOSTON
JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY

(c 1919)
19 12 19

Copyrighted, 1918
by C. J. Bulliet



DEDICATED TO
MISS GENEVIEVE HAMPER
Whose Sunny Disposition Radiated at a Critical
Moment Saved from Gloom and Despair
A GREAT ACTOR
And Whose Constant Encouragement
and Inspiration Have Been
of Invaluable Aid to
THE WRITER

PELTZ 14 NOV 1921

CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| <u>Prologue</u> | <u>v</u> |
| <i>Chapter</i> | |
| <u>I. Introducing the Hero</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>II. An Interruption</u> | <u>8</u> |
| <u>III. The Ancestral Tree</u> | <u>12</u> |
| <u>IV. Wheatsheaf Inn</u> | <u>20</u> |
| <u>V. Early Education</u> | <u>27</u> |
| <u>VI. Red Rodger</u> | <u>36</u> |
| <u>VII. A Stage Career Begins to Forecast</u> | |
| <u>Itself</u> | <u>45</u> |
| <u>VIII. Pausing on the Brink of Vagabondage</u> | <u>52</u> |
| <u>IX. On the Professional Stage at Last</u> . | <u>59</u> |
| <u>X. Four Young Noblemen at Fifteen</u> | |
| <u>Shillings a Week</u> | <u>67</u> |
| <u>XI. First Impressions of America</u> | <u>75</u> |
| <u>XII. Last Days in the Old World</u> | <u>84</u> |
| <u>XIII. Leaping into a Blaze of Glory</u> . . | <u>98</u> |
| <u>XIV. A New Star</u> | <u>107</u> |
| <u>XV. The Phantom of Shakespeare</u> | <u>118</u> |
| <u>XVI. Exile</u> | <u>140</u> |
| <u>XVII. The Lowest Ebb</u> | <u>149</u> |
| <u>XVIII. A Romantic Star Transformed into a</u> | |
| <u>Classicist</u> | <u>163</u> |
| <u>XIX. Re-entry into the Limelight</u> | <u>178</u> |
| <u>XX. King Lear</u> | <u>188</u> |
| <u>XXI. An Interlude of Anecdote</u> | <u>200</u> |
| <u>XXII. The Belated Shower of Gold begins</u> | |
| <u>to Trickle</u> | <u>213</u> |
| <u>XXIII. The Postscriptum</u> | <u>232</u> |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | <i>Frontispiece</i> | |
|--|---------------------|--|
| | <i>Facing Page</i> | |
| “ Robert Mantell’s Romance ” | 22 | |
| Early Recollections | 22 | |
| Roles in which Mantell Startled New York | 100 | |
| Miss Ethel Mantell | 142 | |
| Mantell and His Famous Dog “ Rubber ” | 158 | |
| Robert Bruce Mantell | 164 | |
| Lear and the Dead Cordelia | 194 | |
| “ Brucewood,” the Mantell Estate | 214 | |
| A Master of Make-up | 218 | |
| Two Sharply Contrasted French Studies | 226 | |
| Miss Genevieve Hamper | 238 | |
| The Two Robert Bruce Mantells | 254 | |

PROLOGUE.

Taking the Place of a Preface, which, however, you are not to Escape, but which will Bob up Cunningly during the Course of the Main Narrative.

NOTHING is more interesting to mortals than gossip about their fellow mortals. Some philosopher may read these words of wisdom who finds his own chief delight in the pursuit of an abstract hobby unconnected with the daily toils and delights of humankind. If such should desire to take up the cudgel, an uncompromising peace-lover like myself can only apologize, and excuse him from my sweeping assertion. I am dealing with normal humanity, not with ever-to-be-pitied freaks.

I am content that the two charming women who discuss their neighbors' private affairs over the backyard fence know instinctively and enthusiastically I am right. James Boswell knew it, too, and his biography of pompous old Dr. Johnson will endure as long as there is a language into which to translate it. Plutarch knew it when he set down his lives of the great

Greeks and Romans; and so did Suetonious when he wrote his still more fascinating lives of the Cæsars, so full of intimate episodes.

(Parenthetically, I am delighted that the postal authorities have not discovered Suetonious, just as they have not yet found out those other entertaining gossips, Moses, Samuel, King Solomon and St. Paul. What a shame it would be, if all those rare old chatterboxes were denied the use of the mails!)

Herodotus knew I am right when he stenciled on parchment the scandalous doings of the ancient world, telling, for instance, how a daughter of the Pharaohs extracted from her lovers the price of a pyramid. Michelet knew it when he harkened to the mystic murmurings from the age-stained manuscripts in the archives of Paris. Tacitus knew it when he traced in vitriol the most savagely awful indictment of royal humanity ever penned.

I am pained that Voltaire, the most scintillating intellect of modern times, forgot it when he was working out his dull biography of Charles XII of Sweden, a general as able and perhaps as interesting as Cæsar or Alexander. Charles, alas, must lie in a penumbral oblivion for want of a Plutarch!

Max Nordau, a new philosopher of history, deserves a new Dante to create for him a new limbo of utter dullness. For Nordau would reduce the human record to the record of an impersonal species like the ant or the bumble bee. He would eliminate entirely the element of gossip. What, think you, would history be without the "*Et tu, Brute?*" of Cæsar, the little vanities and weaknesses for femininity of the mighty Napoleon, and the homely yarns of Abraham Lincoln? Would the record that a swarm of human ants flourished, built a city and died take their place in human interest?

So, therefore, go ahead with your gossiping, good friends, with a conscience as clear as a wedding bell. And if, in the midst of your chattering, you can find time for a few gossiping words from a good-natured stranger, I should appreciate your giving ear to the ensuing romance of Robert Mantell, and I can assure you, on my honor, that my hero, whom you have seen oftenest on the stage in stern, tragic mood, is as merry a gossip as any of us.

Robert Mantell's Romance

CHAPTER I.

*Introducing the Hero of these Memoirs in the
Midst of Action, without so much as
Hinting at the Time and Place of his
Birth, thereby Establishing a Precedent
in Modern Biography.*

WHEN the producer of drama sets the stage for a tragedy, he sees to it that externals conform. Night — moaning winds — lightning flashes — the roar of the hurricane.

Nature is not so melodramatic. If the elements are in a turmoil when the moment comes for her deed of destruction, she appropriates the seething background. If not, she proceeds calmly, and even with the fastidious grace of the dilettante.

No one would have suspected her of harboring ill to the meanest creature alive on the last night but one of October, 1878, when the steamer *Helvetia* glided through the Irish Sea and into the channel toward Queenstown. It was the middle of the golden

season the ancients called Halcyon and that we, this side the Atlantic, have picturesquely rechristened Indian Summer. The full moon shone ghostily on an un-ruffled plane of water, bounded dimly in one direction by a hazy line of land.

A tall young man standing on the forward deck of the *Helvetia* drew his overcoat tightly about him as the invigorating sharpness of the October air penetrated to his chest. He had thrust his seaman's cap into his pocket, and his curly yellow hair, worn of a length to delight the soul of an artist, fled back from his forehead in the wind created by the motion of the steamer. Standing alone there in the moonlight, he looked not unlike a youthful descendant of the old Viking demigods, once lords of the British seas.

He remained for a long time in deep meditation of the glories of the night. Then he began pacing slowly back and forth, musing on the future. He was leaving behind him an old world that had held out little promise, for a new world of roseate dreams. The good-bye kisses of a mother were still on his lips, and the memory of her tears brought a tear to the brink of his own eyes.

But the tear quickly sank back into the wells of his heart as from somewhere in

the bowels of the steamer came huskily the strains of the old song:

Rocked in the cradle of the deep,
I lay me down in peace to sleep.

It was not the sentiment of the song that inspired a bright smile, but a mental vision of the singer. A convivial companion had boarded the *Helvetia* at Liverpool who had already on land sought to drown the pangs of parting with friends in a genial glass or two, and after coming aboard had industriously continued the process of submulsive-pang strangulation. As a result, it had been necessary to assist him to his bunk a few minutes ago.

This, then, was the husky-voiced singer who was now seeking repose in the cradle of the deep. The young man on deck listened, smiling more and more broadly, and occasionally chuckling at a strident note, until the strains died away prematurely with the "sparrow's fall" as the songster dropped off into oblivion.

Then the young man's face grew sober as the sentiment of the song, still running through his head, displaced the mental vision of the singer:

Rocked in the cradle of the deep,
I lay me down in peace to sleep.
Secure I rest upon the wave,
For Thou, O Lord, hast power to save.

As he was humming to himself, there grew out of the mist in front of him gradually the lights and then the phantom form of a two-masted cutter. She was proceeding as calmly through the night as was the *Helvetia*. Her course was at right angles to that of the big steamer.

The night was deceptive. Distances were shorter than they seemed in the dreamy October moonlight. The smaller vessel glided in front of the steamer in an effort to cut her course. There was a crash.

The tall young man darted to the rail. He was already throwing a rope overboard when the sailors of the *Helvetia* and the passengers in their night-clothing rushed on deck. A veteran seaman sprang to the assistance of the young man. They felt a tug at the rope.

"Now, me 'arty," said the old sailor, "lend us a 'eave," and the two, hand over hand, drew an exhausted and badly frightened seaman aboard.

"How many are down there?" asked his rescuers.

"About twen-twen-ty-f-five," chattered the half-frozen sailor.

All ropes available were thrown overboard. Boats were lowered and illuminated lifebuoys, then a new invention, which can be seen a considerable distance by a

struggling swimmer, were flung widely in all directions.

The engines of the *Helvetia* were shut off, but not reversed, the captain fearing to dash the brains out of some possible strug-
gler in the water. This little breach of sea regulations afterward cost him his certificate, which he had held with honor for thirty-five years, and prevented a retire-
ment with glory, that he had planned after this very voyage.

The little two-master, it was soon found, had been cut clean through, as by a knife, amidship, and the halves were clinging to the sides of the *Helvetia*. The men at the ropes could look right into the bunks laid open by the fearful force of impact. The seamen in these bunks, thus exposed, who had escaped death from shock were readily rescued. One, still half dazed with sleep when taken aboard, was the source of a little amusement in the grim scene when it was found he still harbored in his cheek an enormous cut of tobacco that he had stowed away comfortably there for the night.

But while the work of rescue was going on, the two fragments of the cutter let go their hold of the *Helvetia* almost simultaneously, and plunged swiftly to the bottom of the channel, carrying with them

nineteen men who had either been killed or stunned by the original shock or had been unable to come within the range of the rescuers. Only seven had been saved.

Such is a record of the destruction of the revenue cutter, *Fanny*, by the transatlantic steamer, *Helvetia*, in the early morning hours of October 31, 1878, in the channel that divides the Irish Sea from the Atlantic Ocean. Nobody ever fully understood it. Was the pilot of the *Fanny* dozing at the wheel when she sprang in front of the *Helvetia*? Or was his eye deceived, like a landsman's, by the spectral lengthening of distances in the October moonlight? The only tongue that could answer has long since disappeared from a gray-green skull lying at the bottom of the channel.

The tall, fair-haired young man on the deck of the *Helvetia* that night was Robert Bruce Mantell. He was on his way to America from England to fill his first theatrical engagement in the New World. In his pocket was a contract providing for a tour of the United States with the Countess Bozenta, whose name goes down more familiarly in stage history as Mme. Modjeska.

A fortnight after the channel disaster, the youthful Robert Mantell made his first appearance on the American stage at Al-

bany, New York, as Tybalt in "Romeo and Juliet." The exact date, O, ye disciples of Rosa Dartle, was November 18, 1878. A generation later, March 21, 1913, a daughter, Ethel Mantell, made her professional début in the same city in a small part in "Julius Cæsar."

CHAPTER II.

Interrupting the Flow of this Narrative to Explain why Chapter I was Written and to Fulfil a Threat.

WHERE is the sense of beginning a biography with the subject already a fully developed personage of twenty-four? Didn't anything happen during that quarter of a century worth recording? Is not the usual attempt to be made to trace in the exploits of the hero in his early youth the elements that led to the development of his character in later life?

Ah, gentle reader (or savage reader, I fear me, if by unfortunate chance you be a critic), I perceive you have forgotten your "Tristram Shandy." Don't you remember how the wicked and witty old clergyman (heaven send us more as wicked and witty as he!) set out conscientiously to record the adventures of Tristram; but how he got himself into a mess of trouble for his pains in starting orthodoxy with the birth of his hero, or rather a few preliminaries to that important event? Page after page flits by, until they count into the dozens,

yes, the scores, yea, the hundreds, and still Tristram is only on the threshold of life — Tristram's father and mother and Uncle Toby demand so much attention.

It was to avoid any such accident as this (scarcely probable in our day of improved literary obstetrics — but well to guard against just the same) that I introduced to you my hero as a living, breathing personage. Now, if I should happen to skip about so long in his ancestral tree that you become anxious to know whether he is ever to be born, why, you can turn back to Chapter I and discover him there as large as life. And if I should linger too fondly, which anciently meant foolishly, over his childhood, and you should grow impatient and ask, "Won't that kid ever grow up and do something?" why, bless your sweet temper, you can turn back again to Chapter I and see how manfully he threw a rope overboard to a helpless seaman.

And now, by way of the preface you escaped in the beginning, here's what I wanted to say principally. In gathering the material for the biography of Robert Mantell, I came into possession of 6742 authentic facts. Now, all the biographers put together of William Shakespeare, with whom Mantell's name is so strongly linked in this generation, have not succeeded in establish-

ing more than seven and one-half facts, and not one of even these so-called facts is so well authenticated as my puny six-thousand-seven-hundred-and-forty-second.

Now, it has come to pass that, from these seven-and-one-half facts, more than one biography of William Shakespeare, in two or three huge volumes, has been written. Now, also, with the aid of good Scotch logarithms (in honor of my Scotch hero, for his nationality you are soon to learn) I have computed that, at that rate, with my 6742 facts, I could write a biography of Robert Mantell to be comprised in 9,425,683 volumes, neatly bound in leather, not including the index.

But don't get alarmed. I was not born with the brutal instincts of a Sydney Lee. I am going to submit my facts to hydraulic pressure that will mould them into homeopathic pellets for quick consumption.

Another thing. I had so much logic and literary technique poured into me in my college days that my mental makeup has had some such revulsion as the stomach of childhood experiences in time against light-brown sugar lumps. Consequently, this biography will refuse absolutely to adhere to any symmetrical plan. Any time I feel like interrupting the narrative to insert something out of its order, or even some-

thing wholly irrelevant, I am going to do it. Or maybe I'll turn the thing topsy-turvy before I'm through with it. Heaven only knows. If it should wind up in a Dantesque dissertation of some phase of the modern theatrical inferno, let no one lose equilibrium.

But, when I have finished, I desire that you shall know Robert Mantell somewhat as you know David Copperfield or Tom Jones — not as you know the bloodless heroes of the "Dictionary of National Biography." Not, alas, that I flatter myself you have so able an introducer, but I want you to become acquainted with the Mantell of flesh and blood, not the Mantell of newspaper clippings. And, if I do any sort of justice to the material in hand, you will read here a tale of romantic adventure, not unworthy, perhaps, to take a humble place with the narratives of the novelists.

CHAPTER III.

Peeking about Discreetly among the Leaves of the Ancestral Tree.

IF ever there was a man supremely happy after the old Hebrew idea that happiness lies in the fathering of a progeny that shall be like unto the sands of the desert for multitude, that man was Robert the Bruce, national hero of Scotland. For there does not breathe a loyal Scot by the name of Bruce who cannot trace his ancestry back to the doughty Robert. There may have been other Bruces in Robert's day, but their descendants, alas, have vanished from the face of the earth.

Robert Bruce Mantell's mother, whose maiden name (for the information of village gossips who have a mania for maiden names) was Bruce — Elizabeth Bruce — was no exception to the general rule of the Bruces. She firmly believed herself to be of the blood of Robert, and, as there were no records disproving the claim, she was allowed to entertain it unmolested.

But, had there been a question, Elizabeth Bruce was prepared to maintain her rights

of descent at the point of a pistol. The pistol I speak of was a relic of Bannockburn, and had been in the family, mouth-to-mouth tradition said, from the time even of the stirring battle. Nay, more, it was carried that day by a Bruce, and tradition was not so sure it wasn't the great Robert himself.

About this same Bannockburn pistol hangs a tale of Robert Mantell's amateur days in Belfast, Ireland, which I am going to tell here.

In Belfast there was a dramatic club, of which young Bob Mantell, semi-clandestinely, because of parental objections, was one of the burning tapers. In this club was also a young man by the name of Allen, who believed himself the victim of a plot to hide his very brilliant light under a bushel. Anyhow, the directors of the club would never give him important rôles in their productions. And so Allen, as many a worthy actor has done before and since his day, determined to break loose and shine for himself as an independent star.

Allen chose "The Lady of Lyons" in which to make his venture, casting himself, of course, as Claude Melnotte. He engaged two professional actresses to support him, picked up some independent amateur talent about town, and then made a raid on his

old dramatic club to round out the cast. Among the members he chose was Bob Mantell, whom he offered ten shillings to appear in a small part.

Bob's mother, a strict Scotch Presbyterian, didn't object too strenuously to his engaging in amateur theatricals, so long as they were kept strictly amateur and private, but she had a horror of the professional stage. Bob knew she wouldn't let him play with Allen in his money-making venture, so, in a laudable determination to keep peace in the family and avoid friction, he didn't say anything to her or any of the others about it.

It was the first time he had been offered money to appear on the stage, and he did honor to the occasion by special exertions to supply a suitable costume. He sewed up with his own hands an old suit of yellow underwear, converting it into tights. An ancient pair of Wellington boots that had been worn by his father, and a discarded frock coat belonging to an elder brother completed his costume. He hired a wig and bought a fierce black moustache. As a finishing touch of villainous realism he thrust the old Bannockburn pistol into his hip pocket.

Thus accoutered on the night of the performance, Robert walked on to the stage

confident nobody would recognize him. His brother Louis, however, sitting in the very front row, noticed something suspicious about the black-bearded villain, and Bob had said only a few words when Louis, all excited, drawled out in a voice that could be heard to the back of the hall:

“Holy Moses! It’s our Bob!”

The youthful actor recovered the best he could from the shock, and went nervously on with his part. But when he tried to draw his pistol to defend virtue or perpetrate vice, he never remembered which, it stuck and wouldn’t come out. A violent wrench, however, brought the Bannockburn relic into view, and Louis, as excited as before, cried out still louder:

“Holy Peter! It’s great-grandfather’s pistol!”

That came near breaking up the performance, and Allen, with all the temperament, if none of the genius, of a real star, became violently angry. Mantell, however, displayed a first flash of the bulldog spirit that long afterward was to spell success for him against mountainous odds, and pulled the show together. The performance proceeded to a finish without any further interruptions from before the footlights.

Whether or not the Bannockburn pistol be accepted as proof conclusive of Elizabeth

Bruce's ancient descent, matters little. What really matters is that she was of the sturdiest Scotch blood, as shall appear in the course of this narrative, and in Scotland a woman's a woman "for a' that," as well as a man. She was a farmer's daughter, honest, healthy, thrifty and canny, and her children never regretted that James Mantell chose her to be their mother.

James Mantell was an Englishman who patriotically hated the Scotch in general, but who showed his good taste by falling in love with one Scotch lass in particular.

The Mantell family is an old one. The first ever-so-great-grandfather of which there is a trace came over with William the Conqueror. This ancient warrior's descendants are not numerous, and the Mantells of England and Scotland are all of fairly close blood relationship.

One of the most distinguished men of whom the family can boast is Dr. Gideon Algernon Mantell, the geologist who immortalized himself by the discovery of the Dinosaurian reptiles. He lived from 1790 to 1852. The greater part of his splendid collection of fossils was purchased by the British Museum, and they form now a very important section of the nation's geological treasures.

But a few fossils from the Mantell col-

lection are scattered through various other museums of England and the United States, and one of these was once the source of an uncomfortable feeling in the breast of Dr. Mantell's now famous cousin, Robert, who was then a struggling young actor.

Robert was one day strolling about Salem, Massachusetts, when his attention was arrested by a fossil fish displayed in a window where scientific instruments were offered for sale. It was labelled "Mantell." Robert thought somebody who had seen the show the night before was "spoofing" him.

Upon inquiry, however, he learned that the fossil was not meant as a symbol of himself as an actor, but had belonged to the original collection of Dr. Mantell, and was highly prized by the owner. It was from the pretty young clerk in this shop that Robert first became definitely acquainted with the fame of the cousin of whom he had before only vaguely heard. The girl, an enthusiast in science, showed the young actor "The Wonders of Geology" and "The Medals of Creation," two of Dr. Mantell's books still highly prized by geologists.

Before Robert Mantell, there is discoverable only one showman in the family. He flourished in the days of Joseph Grimaldi,

the most celebrated of all English clowns, who scored so tremendously in "Mother Goose" and other pantomimes at Covent Garden in the latter days of the eighteenth century. Grimaldi's most formidable rival in pantomime was a Mantell, designated in the prints of the period simply as "Mantell the Clown." The details of his history are lost. Robert Mantell saw a crude picture of "Mantell the Clown" in a tavern in Drury Lane a few years ago. He tried to buy it, but the innkeeper, who prided himself on his collection of stage oddities, refused to part with it for any price.

To stroll back to the immediate parentage. Though of ancient lineage, the Mantells were not wealthy, and James Mantell had to work for a living. As a youth he learned the baker's trade, and he became so proficient in the art that his services were engaged exclusively by Lord Eglinton, whose castle in Ayrshire is still recommended to the attention of tourists by the indefatigable Baedeker.

Lord Eglinton soon found that his baker could do something more than turn out pies and puddings. He heard James Mantell one day singing at his work, and discovered that he had an excellent tenor voice. Lord Eglinton was an extensive entertainer. It was in the days before a

country host could take his guests for an auto spin, broken by a box party at the theatre of a neighboring city. Each member of a congenial company did something to entertain the rest. Singing was the most popular exhibition of talent. When it would come Lord Eglinton's turn, he would say with a lisp famous all over Scotland:

"I canna' thing mythelf, but will have one of my houthold thing for you."

James Mantell won so much applause on such occasions with old Scotch folk-songs that Lord Eglinton became very proud of him. Finally, he promoted him from baker to private secretary. There is extant an old engraving of a famous race at Epsom Downs between Flying Dutchman, Lord Eglinton's horse, and a French contender *Gladiateur*, in which James Mantell is standing beside Lord Eglinton in his new capacity of secretary.

Robert Mantell inherited from his father the fine voice that brought the elder Mantell such good fortune. Robert, however, has chosen to build his own fortune and fame on the dramatic rather than the operatic qualities of his throat. Had he elected otherwise — well, as his best friends know, he can sing an Irish song with a tenderness that would thrill even the worshippers of his old comrade, Chauncey Olcott.

CHAPTER IV.

Hanging a Sign on the Wheatsheaf Inn for the Future Guidance of Tourists in Scotland.

NEXT time you are roaming about picturesque Ayrshire, the country of Robert Burns, take a little run over to Irvine, the village of Robert Mantell. I wish I had done so when I was there, for then I could tell you just where to look and what to expect. But, like you, I had not even so much as heard of the Wheatsheaf Inn, and so you will have to ask somebody in Irvine to point it out to you. If the native should give you a blank stare, hastily add that it is not now an inn, but a crockery shop, and that you want to buy an egg cup or an oatmeal bowl.

It was in the Wheatsheaf Inn that Robert Bruce Mantell, the foremost classic tragedian of this generation, was born on the seventh day of February, 1854.

When James Mantell fell in love with the Ayrshire lass and decided to claim her as his bride, his office as secretary to Lord Eglinton began to shrink and shrivel in his estimation. With the proud new dig-

nity he was about to assume he thought he should have some better foundation for a fortune.

He talked it over with Elizabeth Bruce, and she thought so, too. Accordingly, they decided to lease the little tavern of the Wheatsheaf in the neighboring village of Irvine, and there they began life together, with the blessing of Lord Eglinton.

James Mantell and his pretty bride became highly popular with the little souls in Maeterlinck's "Kingdom of the Unborn," and soon they had around them a flourishing family. No satisfactory explanation has ever been offered of Elizabeth Bruce Mantell's long neglect of the illustrious founder of her race, for it was not until the third boy was born that she honored the memory of the royal hero by naming him Robert Bruce. Was it prophetic foresight? Did the shade of the old Scot himself perchance inspire her at the right moment to designate with his name the particular son who was to become illustrious?

It was in this same Wheatsheaf Inn where he was born that Robert Bruce Mantell was "discovered," in the parlance of the stage. The "discovery" was made by no less a personage than Phineas Taylor Barnum, who has also to his credit General Tom Thumb and the Wild Man of Borneo.

Barnum, once upon a visit to Irvine with a collection of his freaks, stopped over night at the Wheatsheaf Inn. Just after supper, the great showman saw a curly-headed boy of three or four standing in a corner of the dining room with great round eyes regarding in awed silence "General" Thumb. The wonderful seriousness of the child made Barnum laugh. He walked over to the corner of the room, sat down in a huge chair, took Bobbie Mantell on his knee, stroked his head, and remarked, impressively:

"Some day, my lad, you will be a great showman, too."

The boy never forgot Barnum's words. Nor did he forget — though he never employed — Barnum's methods, which even then, child though he was, he dimly appreciated. For, during that visit to Irvine, some of Barnum's disciples put into practice the showman's theory of "a fool born every minute." They loudly proclaimed that inside the stable of the Wheatsheaf Inn could be seen the famous horse "with its tail where its head ought to be." After collecting a modest entrance fee, they exhibited an ordinary horse backed against the manger. They also told wonders of the "great Red Sea" picture, and the gaping Irvinites were shown a monstrous letter



WHEATSHEAF INN ROBERT
MARTELL'S BIRTHPLACE



PARISH CHURCH, IRVINE,
WHERE MARTELL WAS
BAPTIZED

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS



C, done in crimson paint. Barnum himself, it seems, did not openly endorse these crude fakes — he was too much of an artist in fakery for that — but his followers raked in quite a quantity of copper coin before the indignant citizens of Irvine drove them out of town.

When little Bobbie was five years old, James and Elizabeth Mantell came to the conclusion that the Wheatsheaf Inn was too small for their growing family. Learning that there was a more commodious public house on the market in Belfast, Ireland, they decided to emigrate. Accordingly, they disposed of their interests in the Wheatsheaf, and journeyed across the Irish Sea.

When they got to Belfast and took possession of their new hotel, they found that its standing had been misrepresented to them. It was little more than a resort for disreputable characters. But the Mantells were not to be discouraged by a bad bargain, especially one they couldn't get out of. They adopted vigorous measures.

They started by rechristening the hotel the Eglinton-Winton, in honor of James Mantell's illustrious patron, Lord Eglinton. The Winton half of the name belonged to the female side of the Eglinton family. Then, when drunken revellers would come to the door in search of lodging, the new

proprietors drenched them with water from an upstairs window as a gently persuasive hint that their patronage was not wanted.

It was not long before the Eglinton-Winton began to acquire respectability. With respectability came increased patronage, and James Mantell soon discovered that his seven bedrooms could not begin to take care of his guests. Accordingly, as adjoining houses became vacant, he leased them and connected them with his central inn by corridors. Eventually, he had a comfortable-sized hotel of forty rooms.

The Eglinton-Winton became a popular stopping place for theatrical people. From these provincial actors and actresses, who, to his imagination, wore the halos of gods and goddesses, Bobbie Mantell drew inspiration for rosy dreams of a future career on the stage.

His vague ambitions were not long in taking tangible form. James Mantell, always solicitous for the comfort and entertainment of his guests, installed a billiard table, among the first ever seen in an Irish hotel. The billiard room was converted into a theatre by Bob Mantell and his brothers and sisters, with the table as a stage.

The Eglinton-Winton was always deserted at Christmas time, the guests going

home to enjoy the holiday cheer. This fact led the Mantell children to hit upon the Christmas season for amateur theatricals. At first their efforts were extremely crude, but the little players rapidly improved, and before many years the billiard-table stage became the scene of quite respectable performances. Friends were invited to attend, and the youthful Thespians finally arrived at the dignity of a printed program, on which their names appeared opposite the characters in various popular plays of the period — "Therese, the Orphan of Geneva," "Alonzo the Brave," and "The Fair Imogene."

Elizabeth Mantell was heart and soul with her children in these Christmas entertainments, but afterward she was greatly shocked and grieved when Robert Mantell proposed seriously to adopt the stage as a profession. Her strong Scotch Presbyterianism had difficulty in reconciling itself to the professional theatre.

The death of James Mantell brought a sadness into the little Belfast tavern, and the shadow it cast over the billiard-table stage was never lifted. Elizabeth Mantell continued bravely to operate the house. So successful and thrifty was she that she was able to give to each of her four sons and four daughters a tidy little sum when

the time came for them to go out into the world. After her death, Jack Mantell, a younger brother of Robert, ran the place for a time, and then the Eglinton-Winton passed out of the family. It still stands in Belfast.

CHAPTER V.

*Being a Chapter on Education not after the
Manner of Pestalozzi or Any Other Pest.*

THE publisher has been asked to perforate the pages of this chapter close to the inner edge, so they can be torn from the volume like checks from the check book of the happy mortal who either has money in the bank or is not afraid to take chances with the law.

For there are parents who object to putting before the eyes of their children any account of boys and girls who do wicked things and escape the devil. To such parents let me say in my most melancholy manner that I regret deeply Robert Mantell in his school days was not a mirror of perfection. To you other more knowing ones — I join heartily in your chorus, "Thank heaven, he wasn't!"

Robert was sent first to an infants' emporium of learning in Belfast, known as the Model School, and during his brief stay there a little halo surrounded his sunny head.

But — alas for the halo! — he was trans-

ferred shortly to Gribben's Penny School. There he became a "victim of the system," to use the terrible words employed by our modern social upifters in recording the downfall of wretched specimens of humanity.

This particular system was the system of tuition. A child was charged a penny a week for instruction. Bob Mantell was given each week the penny to carry to the master for his share of the learning dispensed. Between the Eglinton-Winton and Gribben's school was a candy shop. One morning, Robert, penny in pocket, with his shining morning face was trudging like snail unwillingly to school. He passed the candy store. A particularly tempting "sweetie" was in the window. He paused. Gribben had never fortified the morals of his pupils with stories of the beautiful boyhood of George Washington. (Pity the Irish schoolboy — he has no George Washington!) Robert Mantell was lost. Gribben's school knew him not that week. Little Bobbie spent seven days of mortal terror. Next week the penny went to Gribben. No questions were asked. The sky didn't fall. Bobbie had "got away with it." Five more pennies at intervals went into the candy shop before he was discovered. Here we ring down the curtain for

a moment to give Bobbie's mother a chance, being firmly convinced from extensive reading of criminology that all punishment should be inflicted in private.

Robert next was sent to Miss Smith's school for boys and girls. Miss Smith one day undertook to chastise Robert's smaller brother, Jack. The blood of old Robert the Bruce stirred in the arteries of his sturdy little namesake. He made a rush at Miss Smith and seized hold of her to drag her away from Jack. In the struggle, he tore her clothing and broke a gold chain she wore around her neck. But sex antagonism was aroused in the little girls of Miss Smith's school. The tiny Amazons sprang to their heroine's assistance. They fell upon Robert and pushed and beat him out of the room. Robert Bruce Mantell never in his palmiest days of matinée idol was the victim of such another mad rush of femininity.

Robert quite naturally did not go back to Miss Smith's school, even for his slate and pencil. After a family council of war in which brother Jack stoutly upheld his champion, it was decided to send him to Dr. Rennie's school for boys, where the discipline was reputed strict.

For a time he was bluffed by the severe masters employed by Dr. Rennie; and was

making some little progress in the elements of learning, which had been his last consideration in school heretofore, when a conspiracy was hatched. Robert, whose fame had been established by the episode at Miss Smith's school, was chosen ring-leader. The boys all agreed to get up and walk out when a certain class was called. Robert, at the appointed time, started for the door, but nobody followed. The others, apparently, were paralyzed by a common impulse or lack of impulse. Robert was opening the door when the headmaster seized him. The pedagogue wasted no words. Guessing shrewdly at the truth, he started to flog the arch conspirator. But Robert, savagely angry at both the teacher and his cowardly associates, picked up a heavy slate, which had no wooden frame as slates have now-a-days, and hit the master such a blow on the knee that he split the flesh to the bone, cracked the kneecap and sent the pedagogue to the hospital for repairs.

Bob Mantell's stock as battler in a good cause shot sky high with the schoolboys of Belfast, and he became the idol of the hour. It was with difficulty, however, that his long-suffering family kept him out of the clutches of the law, and with even greater difficulty that they found a school-

master willing to undertake his future education.

But queer old William Campbell decided to take a chance. Campbell might have stepped out of a page of Dickens, with all the embellishments of Cruikshank. He was bald, with the exception of a tuft of hair above each temple. These tufts he allowed to grow long, and tied them together across the top of his head. A thin, studious, dried-up face, bordered by straggling sideburns, completed the picture of his globule of intelligence. He was lame, and walked with a crutch heavily shod with iron. An incomprehensible vanity in a creature so chastised by nature decreed an immaculate white shirt with ruffled front and a starched waistcoat on all occasions.

Master Campbell had a deplorable weakness, of which his boys often took advantage. He was apt to fall asleep in the schoolroom any moment. One day, when he was all oblivious of his surroundings, some of the boys stole up to him, carefully untied the tufts of hair and left them lying on top his bald pate. They then stole as quietly back to their places. Bob Mantell had no hand in this mischief, not because he would have hesitated to help, but because he happened to be busy at the time filling desk inkwells from a big bottle.

Campbell woke up with a sneeze that brought the loosened tufts down his cheeks. He glared around. Bob Mantell, the assailant of Miss Smith and of Rennie's headmaster, was standing in front of him, with his back turned, filling an inkwell. It was a case of the dog and the bad name. Campbell picked up his crutch, took deliberate aim, and hit the boy a sharp blow on the ear with the iron nib. Bob whirled round with a howl, dashed the ink from his big bottle into the face and over the ruffled shirt and white waistcoat of the master, and fled from the room.

So ended his schooldays at Campbell's. But here he must have learned something by absorption, as he never took the trouble to study.

Campbell thought well of him as a pupil, as was proven years later when Robert Mantell, then famous as a tragedian, was playing an engagement in Portland, Oregon. There he met a Dr. William Campbell, who turned out to be a grandson of the quaint old Belfast schoolmaster. Dr. Campbell showed Mr. Mantell a letter written to him by his grandfather, who had Chesterfield's habit of narrating events and conveying moral reflections in epistles. This particular letter was written some little time after the youthful Mantell had shocked

his relatives and friends by adopting the stage as a profession.

"One of the brightest boys I ever had," said the schoolmaster, "was a lad named Robert Mantell. But, alas, he has thrown his life away by going onto the stage, and consequently to the devil."

Mr. Mantell, in the maturity of years, is inclined to look upon this observation as on the flattering epitaphs cut into the white marble of the tomb.

"After I went on the stage," he remarked to me, "I was as good as dead in poor old Campbell's opinion, and I am grateful to him for that epitaph. It is the only way I can account for his remark about my brightness. For I was certainly as idle and worthless in his school as anybody could be. I marvel I ever learned to read and write."

But the wicked Mantell boy did learn to read and write, and it was in McClinton's Seminary, where he went after Campbell's, that the youthful reprobate began to disappoint those doleful well-wishers who could see only the gallows stretched across the path of his future.

Perhaps it was athletics that absorbed the surplus deviltry in his nature and made possible the gentle upwelling of more respectable qualities. Anyhow, the friends of

athletics are given gratis this hint for a text. If they fail to preach a convincing sermon from it, it is not my fault.

Bob Mantell turned his energies to strenuous games, and it wasn't long before he began winning fame for himself and for his school by his achievements. The climax came when he was presented with a silver cup by Lord Waverly as the winner of a 250-yard race. As a cricketer he became so proficient that he was given a place on a semi-professional team that defended the honor of Belfast against all comers.

A school friend of those days was the athlete Dunlop, credited with the invention of the bicycle having wheels of equal size, and certainly the inventor of the pneumatic tire which bore his name. This tire will, or will not, be remembered by the readers of the nocturnal adventures of the amateur cracksman, Raffles, according to the retentive powers of their brain cells. As for the bicycle wheels of equal size, Dunlop appears to be in the predicament of the Chinese so famous for being robbed of their ancient inventions long afterward.

The story of Dunlop and his bicycle is too good to be left untold, especially as Mantell was an eye-witness of his sensational triumph in a famous race. This race was to be held on a turf track just outside

Belfast. There had been a rain the night before, and the track was softer even than it would have been naturally.

The racers appeared with their high front wheels and narrow iron rims. Just before they were to start, out lumbered Dunlop on a crazy machine of his own invention — a bicycle with wheels of equal size and monster rubber tires inflated with air. There was a general laugh. The judges, joining in the merriment, gave Dunlop the limit of the handicap on account of the crudity of his mount.

Of course, it happened as it always does in a well-regulated athletic romance. The hard, narrow rims of the other racers cut into the turf, while Dunlop's machine sped lightly along to an easy victory.

Dunlop, it seems, patented his bicycle, but there was an irregularity in the patent, and he never reaped from it the fortune that was his due.

CHAPTER VI.

*Reciting the Thrilling Episode of Red Rodger,
the Daffy King of the Fairies.*

LET me now embalm a military document whose hero, Red Rodger, is worthy of figuring in an ambitious ballad of Erin. Alas! I can offer him nothing more now than a humble secondary place in this biography. The author of the tale of Rodger's exploits is Corporal Hamilton H. Dobbin of the San Francisco police force, a boyhood friend of Robert Mantell, and a veteran of the Belfast wars you are now to read about. I intend to make you more particularly acquainted with Corporal Dobbin, who can "spot" a pretender to Shakespearean knowledge as readily as a pretender to civic honesty, after you have read his account of this battle dreadful. Here it is, in his own words, just as he wrote it to me:

"In Belfast in the days of our wild youth, there were several factions or gangs forever ready to engage in hostilities at the drop of a hat. The one to which Bob Mantell and I belonged, while long on style, finance and courage, was short in numbers.

The gang to which we were particularly hostile had the numbers and plenty of courage besides.

"One day there arose a dispute over some matter, I've forgotten what, perhaps 'to 'ell with the Pope or King William' or maybe both. It was decided that it should be fought out on the day following.

"After school hours, the leaders of the two gangs got together to arrange the rules of the conflict. It was agreed that sticks, stones and fists would be allowed, and that only knives and firearms should be barred.

"Mantell was the leader of our gang, and you will see how good a general he proved himself to be. Owing to our scarcity of numbers, the majority of us felt that we were doomed to sure defeat. But Bob proposed in our secret council that we engage the services of Red Rodger. To this we all enthusiastically agreed, leaving the whole matter of arrangement to Bob.

"Red Rodger was a town character. He never recognized any gang. He was looked upon as being simple-minded, but, in reality, was more knave than fool. He was a great admirer of Bob, because the Mantell boy was kind to him. When Rodger chanced to meet him, he would salute by doffing his ragged cap and giving his foretop of very bright red hair a jerk and exclaiming,

'Perty Montle! Perty Montle!' (his way of pronouncing 'Mantell'). This elaborate salute seldom failed to draw a copper or two from the pocket of Bob. The only failure I remember was an occasion on which Mantell was 'broke.' Then, instead of a copper, Bob slipped a peppermint lozenge into the hand of Rodger. Red started his usual scrape and bow of thanks, but, upon discovering the imposition, went off along a tangent of as rich profanity, in which 'North of Ireland' and 'Orangeman' were mingled, as ever was heard in Belfast. Instead of 'Perty Montle,' Bob was the vilest rogue unhung.

"In appearance, Rodger was a sight to behold. No stage Irishman ever approached him in rough make-up. His red hair grew through the top of his cap; his breeches were all out at the knees and frayed at the bottom, with several patches of foreign cloth of various patterns and designs about the legs, and his bare feet were knarled and knotty. When somebody would give him a pair of shoes, he seldom wore them, but tied them together and slung them over his shoulder. His face, besides being dotted with big freckles, was bleached in spots.

"Bob immediately got in touch with this sorry specimen of humanity. He told him of the battle to be fought next day, and

came easily to terms with him through the magic of a couple of coppers. He got his promise to be on hand at the appointed place with as many boys as he could collect to follow him.

"That same evening, arrangements were completed for the battle. Stones were gathered into little heaps along the road where they could be got at handily, and choice billets of wood were hidden in out-of-the-way, but convenient, places.

"Next day at the hour appointed, both gangs mobilized at a safe distance from each other. Our gang stood where we were, killing time by every device we could contrive, waiting for Red Rodger, who was late, but who, we were confident, would not fail us. The other fellows advanced up the road by short stages, until they reached a point about a hundred yards from where we were stationed. There they halted, fearing some trickery from our immobility. They yelled for us to come on, but we didn't stir.

"While the puzzled enemy was debating a plan of action, who should rush down the road at our rear but our ally, Red Rodger, followed by a gang yelling like wild Indians. And such a sight! I have described Rodger's appearance and make-up. Well, Rodger, in comparison with his followers, looked like

an East Indian Prince in the full regalia of his splendor. A rougher, tougher-looking bunch never cut a throat nor scuttled a ship.

"Rodger ran up to our general with his usual bow and scrape and his salutation of 'Perty Montle.' Bob quickly formed his reinforcements in line of battle, and hurriedly instructed them as to their position and duty in the coming conflict. Then, he gave sharp command to all his troops to advance.

"The enemy had been apparently stunned by our accession of allies. When we came to within fifty yards of them, and they got a good look at Rodger and his band, their general gave the word to retreat. As they slowly backed away, we, in our turn, taunted them to come on. But, after a brief consultation among themselves, they threw down their clubs and stones, and came toward us displaying white handkerchiefs.

"We grounded arms, but did not discard them, and waited for the enemy to open negotiations. Their general declared the fight off, and gave as the reason that they were not going to battle with elves and fairies. They were perfectly willing to go against 'humans,' but drew the line at demons led by that daffy Red Rodger.

"As they would not go into action, we

declared ourselves victors, and admonished the enemy never to trespass in our part of the town. After they had solemnly agreed, both armies disbanded.

"On the following day, Red Rodger was arrayed like the main guy at a royal wedding. The clothes were the gift of our gang in celebration of our famous bloodless victory. Rodger even consented to wear shoes on this occasion.

"Just where or how Red Rodger recruited his gang of heathenish ragamuffins was never learned. Some said he picked them up in Ballmacarret; others thought they came from the Falls Road. The majority of our opponents stoutly maintained, and the survivors among them doubtless will insist to this day, that they were real fairies, and that Red Rodger was in league with the elvish band."

The fortunes of peace — perhaps no less renowned — certainly no less intricate — than the fortunes of war, separated Bob Mantell and Ham Dobbin not long after this exploit. Mantell, as will be made manifest in these memoirs, became a famous actor. Dobbin went to sea, and for years sailed "beyond the sunset and the path of all the western stars."

We find Dobbin in the spring of 1878 going ashore in San Francisco to see a per-

formance by Mme. Modjeska, whom Mantell was to join the following autumn for his first tour of America. Dobbin left his ship in the bay to attend the theatre with the captain and his wife, and to row them back to the vessel after the performance.

Some years afterward, Dobbin put into the port of San Francisco for good. There, like many a loyal and faithful Irishman who had gone before, he joined the police force.

Mantell, now famous, frequently visited the San Francisco theatres. But Dobbin, while he went to witness every performance of his former playmate, had not the courage to call upon him and introduce himself. He, a lowly policeman, was uncertain of the reception that would be accorded him by the illustrious matinée idol.

It was not until the visit of Mantell to San Francisco in 1907 that Dobbin finally screwed his courage to the sticking point. Mantell and his wife had taken apartments for the two weeks of their stay in a house in Fulton Street, directly opposite Alamo Square.

Dobbin formed a plan of action. He would call on Mantell. If he found the actor supercilious and snobbish, like too many idols of the stage, he would transact some trivial business and leave without disclosing his identity. But if —.

He reached the door of the house and

rang the bell of the Mantell apartment. The door was opened by Mantell's little Japanese valet, Wieda.

"Does Mr. Mantell live here?" asked Dobbin.

Before Wieda could reply, a voice from the top of the stairs answered heartily:

"You bet he does; come right on up — I know the dialect!"

The cheery voice and outstretched hand convinced Dobbin. He sprang up the stairs two steps at a time.

"Well! Well," said the actor, grasping his old friend by the shoulders at arm's length. "Come out to St. Michael's field, and I'll gi' ye a Hogan!"

Dobbin shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. He, too, remembered the drubbing Mantell had given him on St. Michael's common just a day or two before their parting in Belfast. Tears in Dobbin's eyes were mingled with the laughter. In his wildest dreams he had not pictured such a greeting from his old friend of thirty years ago. This was the man who, for a score of years, he had longed yet dreaded to meet. He told Mantell so.

"Why, you old stiff," cried the actor, mingling modern American slang with ancient Scotch poetry, "don't ye know a man's a man for a' that?"

44 ROBERT MANTELL'S ROMANCE

That's the reason Robert Mantell can now commit anything short of murder in San Francisco.

CHAPTER VII.

*In Which a Stage Career Begins to Forecast
Itself with the Famous Inevitableness of a
Greek Tragedy.*

WHEN knowledge did eventually begin to find some sort of lodgement in Bob Mantell's head, it immediately sought vent at his mouth, and so it was decided that the boy should become a barrister, the logical fate in those days of a youth given to "spouting."

Consequently, he was turned over to a "grinder" named Smiley, who was commissioned to "grind" into his head all of the law of the realm in and out of Blackstone. Smiley was considered the most expert tutor in Belfast. Mr. Mantell still looks back at him with an awe forty years have not diminished. Smiley knew everything there was to be known about all subjects. Mathematics, history, law, medicine, literature — nothing had escaped him.

Smiley bombarded Mantell for months with the most intensive shrapnel from the arsenal of learning, and then one day went quietly to his mother and told her it was

no use. Her son had never been cut out for a K. C.

The boy was now fifteen years old, strong, robust and athletic. It was decided, after Smiley's report, to put him to work. Accordingly, he was apprenticed to a wholesale liquor dealer named Neill. Here he was employed for five years, largely in connection with the customs side of the business, and so successful was he that, in time, boy though he was, he had the direction of sixty men.

But, though the work was not hard, there were disagreeable features to it. It was badly paid, for one thing. Then, among his sixty workmen were too many threats of what a young man with a natural taste for the contents of the vats might come to, himself, in time. Mantell still has a vivid remembrance of the more maudlin of these wrecks of humanity, who would conceal in their clothing short sections of slender gas pipe, through which they would suck liquor from the vats when their youthful overseer turned his back for a moment.

But it was the comparative independence he acquired through his apprenticeship at Neill's — an apprenticeship that finds a parallel in stage history in David Garrick's occupation as wine-seller — that paved the way for Mantell's future as an actor. He

had rid himself of the disagreeable thought of a career as a lawyer. He knew he could make a living at his present trade, and worry on the score of mere subsistence was discarded. He had not forgotten Barnum's prophecy of his destiny as a showman; he had not forgotten the halo that glowed round the heads of the touring actors and actresses who visited the Eglinton-Winton; he had not forgotten his pleasure in his own performances on the billiard-table stage during the Christmas seasons.

Now, while still at Neill's, he groped about vaguely in search of a threshold to a stage career. The door he entered was Robert Houston's elocution class, whose meetings, fortunately, were at night.

Here, at last, Robert Mantell made progress in a branch of learning, and made it fast. Houston, who afterwards won distinction in New York as a teacher of elocution, discovered unusual talent in the boy, and developed it so rapidly that it was not long before Mantell became one of his assistant readers on tours of surrounding towns.

Upon one occasion, Houston, Mantell and a singer by the name of Pat Kearns went over to the village of Larne to give an entertainment. Houston had a class at Larne, and naturally expected a good crowd.

But it happened that certain Larnites were giving an entertainment of their own this very night, and everybody in the village went to that, except two elderly women and a small boy, who evidently preferred big city talent.

Houston was not to be discouraged by such a little accident as an empty house, and started the entertainment. The two elderly ladies and the small boy appeared mightily pleased. Rarely in the world's history has there been so unanimously sympathetic an audience. Houston and Mantell were amused. Kearns was disgusted. He took Mantell aside.

"Bob," he whispered, "we must get rid of that 'crowd' some way — they'll sit through the whole bloomin' program, if we don't do something. Houston'll go right on through with it. It's up to you or me." Then, after a moment's pause: "I have it — when it comes your turn again, don't recite, but sing something."

Mantell agreed, and, sure enough, as he was finishing his song the old ladies and the little boy quietly stole away.

Another time, Mantell and Billy Laird, both of whom had won gold medals at Houston's school, were engaged, for two pounds, to give an entertainment in a neighboring town. Much was expected of

them, as Belfast "gold medallists" were highly regarded.

When they got to the town, the two young men found they were to give their entertainment in a church, and, to make matters worse, not from a platform, but from the pulpit. They were taken aback, as their repertoire wasn't exactly of the Sunday school variety.

But they decided to risk it. Laird made the first venture with "Toby Tosspot," a humorous poem of the bibulous variety, highly popular in that day. As Laird got deeper and deeper into a really excellent drunken impersonation, Mantell noticed the brows of the minister contracting into a darker and darker frown.

When the poem was finished, the reverend gentleman, with aggressive dignity, got up and announced quietly that Mr. Laird would have nothing more to do with the entertainment, but that Mr. Mantell would give the entire program. Mantell racked his brains for churchly numbers, and, by dint of judicious selection and impromptu expurgation, saved the day. He got his sovereign, but Laird got nothing but an icy shoulder from the entire congregation.

Mantell's success as a public entertainer added fuel to the flame of his desire to go on the stage. He was one of the moving

spirits in the organization of an amateur dramatic club that began eventually to give performances of a highly meritorious character. They rented scenery and costumes from the regular theatres and staged their productions ambitiously. The expenses were defrayed by contributions from the members, and afterwards by a shilling admission fee to the performances.

A disturbing element of the club was Dick Davis, a royal good fellow at heart, but gifted by nature with a disposition that could never lie parallel with any other disposition. This budding young Roscius finally became so troublesome, that, by unanimous vote, he was expelled.

Davis resolved on an exquisite revenge. His opportunity came at the next public performance of the club. The gallant young Thespians of Belfast had made it a rule that ladies, accompanied by male escort, should be admitted free to their entertainments. Davis sized up the capacity of the hall where the performance was to be given, and then went around to all the young women of his acquaintance and invited them to accompany him to the show.

His unexampled popularity with the sweeter sex is attested by the fact that, on the night of the performance, fully fifty girls were on the steps bright and early at

the invitation of Davis. When the door opened, Davis bought a ticket, and took in on it all his female friends, giggling at the joke. They filled every seat in the little hall. When the curtain went up, Davis, sitting in the front row with a grin all over his face, beamed brightly at his former fellow players.

It was in this club, with as merry a crowd as ever lived, that Robert Mantell gained his first real experience as an actor. His lessons in elocution at Houston's, combined with a naturally good voice and a handsome face and figure, made him a leading spirit of the club.

When, finally, in the last year of his apprenticeship at Neill's, "Richelieu" was staged by the club at the Theatre Royal in Belfast for a church benefit, Robert Mantell was cast for the rôle of De Mauprat. It was his first appearance in a real theatre. Heretofore, he had played only in halls. The year was 1873. Mantell was nineteen.

CHAPTER VIII.

*Pausing on the Brink of the Horrible Realm
of Vagabondage before Taking the Final
Fatal Plunge.*

WHEN he left the wholesale liquor house, Robert Mantell's mind was made up. He would be an actor. His mother was heart-broken. His old nurse, when she heard his resolution, cried, "O, Bobbie, Bobbie boy!" and went weeping to her own little room. A funeral in the house could not have been more depressing. Almost as well be dead as fall into eternal disgrace.

In order to appreciate the force of these lamentations, it is necessary, and not uninteresting, to glance at the social status of the actor in England and the English dependencies in 1873. For the Scotch Presbyterianism of Elizabeth Bruce Mantell, strict as it was, will not account fully for the effect produced by the resolution of her son.

In those days, the actor was looked upon as little better than the vagabond the law of the realm classed him. No respectable person liked to be caught on the street with

one of these picturesque strollers. It was all right to ask him to take a drink with you at the bar of a public house. Even, under certain circumstances, you could invite him into your home for a few hours, but distinctly as a social inferior. Mantell's own brothers, once when he returned home for a visit after a season on the stage, were squeamish about walking down the street with him, although they treated him decently enough at home. Mantell had many of these "left-handed friends" in Rochdale, where he first played.

In those days, too, it was hard to find in the rural districts a public house that would keep an actor over night. Many and many a time Mantell had the door of an inn slammed in his face when he revealed his profession.

On one occasion, after he had been sleeping in haystacks for several nights, he applied at a neat-looking rooming house for lodging. He was asked his business. He said he was traveling for a London firm, which was the truth, so far as it went. He was given a soft, clean bed, and soon forgot his troubles. When he awoke in the morning, however, he found his portmanteau neatly packed and sitting on the doorstep outside. Upon inquiring the reason, the proprietor of the inn told him kindly enough

that, during the night, he had learned he was an actor, and he couldn't keep him any longer. He had let him have his sleep out and wouldn't accept any money for his night's lodging, doubly proving his humanity. But prejudice was prejudice, and actors couldn't stay and disgrace his house.

In spite of the rapid strides toward respectability stage people have made in forty years, some such prejudice as this is still traceable in rural England and America. I have found relics of it in small towns in the South, where hotel proprietors would a little rather that the stage folk would stop at a rival hotel, and leave their commercial custom unmolested.

Prejudice dies hard in the Anglo-Saxon breast — perhaps, also, in the Hottentot and the Malay — and I am tempted to trace here this most interesting one through history.

The Regulations of the "Ancient Customary of Brittany," of venerable but uncertain date, contain this article:

"Among those who are regarded as infamous in the eye of the law, and incapable of acting as witnesses, are lewd women, hangmen of thieves, horse-knackers, hawkers of pastry, and, among others, 'retailers of wind,' that is to say any performers on

the violin and bagpipe, mountebanks and players, who lead a life full of infamy and scandal. Because, in point of fact, there is no profession more infamous and more remote from the natural duty of all men than that of devoting one's life to the amusement of others."

This severe indictment, the teeming root of trouble to English-speaking players throughout dozens of generations, has not been lived down completely to this day. The opinion was reflected in a law of 1572, which sought to suppress all acting except that under the patronage of great personages, by pronouncing unattached players "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars," and threatening any one who should harbor them with the punishment of being "greviously whipped and burnt through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about."

(If the innkeeper who set Mantell's portmanteau outside had even the vaguest of atavistic sensibility in his makeup, can you wonder at his action?)

It was in the cheerful times of the law of 1572 that the star of Shakespeare arose. Richard III, whom Shakespeare has gratefully held up to the detestation of all future generations, was the first powerful English friend of the players, and it was through

his example, in attaching actors to his household, that the modifying clause exempting from punishment those under the patronage of great personages was made possible.

Elizabeth, who now sat on the throne, and her successor, James, were of as broad mind as Richard had been with regard to the stage, and they were lax in the enforcement of the more severe clauses of the laws against the players.

But the Reformation gave birth to still more drastic legislation, and these laws, religiously enforced, all but wiped the stage out of existence.

The Restoration brought the actor back, and with him an institution new to the English theatre, the actress. But licentiousness, general in this period of reaction against Puritanism, reached its climax on the stage, and while the players found themselves no longer subject to persecution, they were in profound moral disrepute.

From the period of Charles II to the present day, the English-speaking actor has been climbing slowly and painfully to his present position of decent citizenship. As late as 1875, when players were invited to great functions in England to use their talents in the general merry-making, a silken cord was stretched across the drawing-room to separate the stage people from

the rest of the guests. But the cord was abolished in time, and the actors began to mingle with the men of letters, the statesmen and the lords and ladies of the realm.

Then, in 1895, Queen Victoria, the most liberal-minded woman who ever sat on a throne, raised an actor, Henry Irving, to the peerage. The fight for respectability was won.

It was in 1873 and in the very teeth of the "Ancient Customary of Brittany" that Robert Mantell resolved to go on the stage. He made one concession to his mother. He would not disgrace the family name by dragging it into the mire of vagabondage behind the footlights. He would call himself Robert Hudson.

More than that — he would go to America, and nobody need ever know of his disgrace. His brother James was purser on the steamer *Samaria*, plying between Liverpool and Boston. He would work his way across the Atlantic.

Elizabeth Mantell gave in. She presented Robert with the same little sum of money she had given his older brothers when they started out into the world, and with it her blessing.

The voyage to Boston was uneventful. Robert landed on American soil, and walked whistling up the street in search of a suit-

able theatre in which to make his début. The name of the street, he doesn't know. Nobody, except a sleep-walker, ever succeeded in retracing his first steps in Boston.

It was in May, 1874, that Robert Mantell began calling on the Boston theatrical magnates. Much to his astonishment, none of them appeared effusive over the yellow-haired Scotch elocutionist with the Irish brogue. The tenth day he counted his money. There was just enough left to buy a return ticket to Queenstown, and a few shillings over.

Mantell became panic-stricken. He rushed to the steamship office. Yes, the *Hecla* was leaving that very day. He bought a ticket. Then he ran back to his little hotel, packed his belongings, paid his bill, and a few hours later was steaming away from America.

The land of promise had repulsed him coldly. He had found out all about America in ten days.

CHAPTER IX.

On the Professional Stage at Last, Happy but Penniless.

IT wasn't exactly as the conquering hero he had pictured to himself that Robert Mantell returned to Belfast.

But one person was secretly glad of it, and that was Elizabeth Mantell. She hoped the little adventure had cured her boy, and that now he would settle down to the life of a respectable tradesman.

Robert, indeed, made some such resolution, for he wasn't particularly proud of his exploit. But the old fever was too strong, and he began looking about for a theatrical engagement. He didn't want to go on the stage in Belfast, because of his mother's objections to a stage career, and because, also, of a secret uneasiness concerning his talents. He did not relish registering any brilliant failure at home.

He learned from a friend, Frank Clements, of a small opening in a stock company at the Theatre Royal, Rochdale, Lancashire, England. He applied for it and got it. There, on the night of October 21, 1876, without flourish of trumpet or clash of

cymbals, Robert Bruce Mantell made his professional stage débüt. But he was registered as Robert Hudson, and his name appeared opposite the Sergeant in Dion Boucicault's "Arrah-na-Pogue."

Some idea of Mantell's ability as an actor at the outset of his career can be gathered from a story he is fond of telling.

Years afterward when he had won his spurs in "Fedora," Mantell and a number of brother actors were sitting one night around a table in the old Morton House, New York. In the circle was the veteran George Clarke, a leading member of Augustin Daly's company. The conversation turned on the ludicrous in acting.

"George," somebody asked Clarke, "who was the worst actor you ever saw?"

The veteran pondered. "I've seen so many bad ones," he said, "that I really can't answer off-hand. Oh, yes," suddenly brightening, "I know now. I was playing once in a little town in England, Rochdale, I think. I was visiting star in 'The Shaughraun.' There was a callow young galoot, a member of the local stock company, who was cast as Father Doolan. That young man was the very worst actor I ever saw!"

"The drink's on me, Mr. Clarke," spoke up Mantell. "I was that Father Doolan."

The night of the first presentation of

"The Merchant of Venice" by the stock company in Rochdale came near proving the Waterloo of the "callow galoot." A few kind words from the stage manager, Richard Edgar, saved a career.

Mantell was cast for Salarino. When he walked on, in the first act, and opened his lips to speak, he noticed some people in the audience holding the book on him. It was his first experience of the kind, and a sudden fear that he would make a mistake in his lines rendered him speechless. The others on the stage, experienced stock actors, sized up the situation, and quickly "faked" across his lines.

Mantell walked off the stage cast down to the lowest depths. He was a failure. His career was ended. With his head bowed in the misery of defeat, and looking neither to the right nor the left, he made slowly for the stage door, opened it, and started out.

"Where are you going?" asked Edgar, who was decked in the gaudy paraphernalia of Launcelot Gobbo.

"Home," answered Mantell, drearily.

"Hadn't you better leave those clothes, then?" said Edgar, but with a kindly humor in his voice.

"Pardon me," replied Mantell, hastily. "I forgot. I was so worried I didn't know what I was doing."

"What are you worried about?" asked Edgar, who already knew.

"My career's all over," answered Mantell, tragically. "You saw how I spoiled the performance. I'm not fit for the stage."

"Oh, come," cried Edgar, slapping him heartily on the back. "That was nothing. Cheer up, my boy. We all go through things like that. The best of us are liable to go up in our lines at any moment."

The youth, with grateful tears in his eyes, grasped the hand of the stage manager. He never forgot that little experience, and many a raw beginner in his own company has blessed, without knowing it, the kindly spirit of Edgar.

And so Robert Mantell was a full-fledged actor, though truly, as Shakespeare would say, only a fledgling still. He was given small rôles in all the productions, and when the Christmas season came round, he celebrated the anniversary of his billiard-table performances by taking part in the Rochdale pantomime. Complimentary words from his fellow players, and occasionally from the great Edgar himself, caused him to feel that he had made no mistake in the choice of a profession. He was happy in the feeling. He was blissfully ignorant of George Clarke's opinion of his Father Doolan.

But his happiness was not of the tainted variety that comes, according to the orthodox moralists, with great riches. His contribution to the gayety of Rochdale was rewarded with less than four American dollars a week.

How did he manage to live on that? Easily enough, with dreams of a rosy future as an aid to subsistence. He and three other young men drawing the same salary took a couple of rooms in a cheap lodging house that wasn't above giving shelter to actors. They bought their own provisions, and the lady of the house cooked them. Meat was a luxury. They would buy it in chunks and cut it into slices thin as paper for frying. They learned to play a joke on their stomachs. They would put a small bit of the bacon in their mouths. Then, while eating several slices of bread, they would roll the bacon about with their tongues, occasionally even biting it between their teeth. After appeasing their hunger with the bread, they would swallow the bacon.

The season at Rochdale wasn't overwhelmingly successful to the impresario of the stock company, in spite of his diminutive salary list, and early in the spring Mantell's first engagement ended with the disbanding of the players.

But he wasn't long without work. There was an open-air celebration — a sort of fair — in honor of Eastertide at Bolton, a distance of only ten or fifteen miles. Thither trudged the young actor with confidence born of a season of experience.

The tragedian, Heffernan, was holding forth in a tent at the fair. To him Mantell applied for a job. Heffernan's company was short, and when he found he could get the handsome young applicant for mere living expenses, he engaged him.

Heffernan was a character. He was an actor of high talent and infinite resources, lacking nothing but the final touch that spells success. He was popular throughout provincial England, but could never succeed in London.

Heffernan's exhibitions at the fair were a sample of his resourcefulness. He had made versions of "Macbeth," "Othello," "Richard III," "Hamlet" and the rest, so hydraulically condensed that he could give ten or a dozen performances a day. He did his work so well that his audiences usually went out with the impression that they had seen Shakespeare.

Before the start of one of these tabloid performances, Harlequin, Pantaloona, Columbine and the rest would come out in front of the tent and give a characteristic exhibi-

bition of foolery and sentiment that would cause a gaping crowd to assemble. The Columbine Mr. Mantell remembers particularly as a deliciously exquisite creature who seemed the very fairy she impersonated. When the little open-air performance was over, the Clown would announce:

“Now, good people, step inside and see the famous drama of Master William Shakespeare, called ‘Macbeth.’ The best seats are only tuppence, and a single penny will admit you to witness the marvelous blood-curdling tragedy!”

Usually the crowds would flock into the tent on the trail of Columbine. Inside were rough wooden benches. The penny seats were separated from the twopence by a row of spikes turned toward the rear. Presently the curtain would go up, and Heffernan, assisted principally by members of his own family, would wade in blood to his eyes through the most harrowing of Shakespeare’s scenes. His acting was intensely vivid, if not artistically finished.

One day, Heffernan was raving through “Macbeth.” He was in the midst of the scene following the murder of Duncan.

“Is this a dagger which I see before me?” he shrieked in frenzy.

“Naw,” drawled a raw-boned Scot, seated

in the front row. "It's the skin o' a finnan haddie!"

"I'll finnan haddie ye!" yelled the tragedian, and, leaping across the foot-lights, he sprang upon the Scotchman, gave him a sound drubbing, and then kicked him up the aisle and out of the tent.

Heffernan then went back to the stage, plunged once more into the rôle of Macbeth, and finished the performance as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Of such stuff were made the tragedians in the school of hard knocks where Robert Mantell learned his art. Is it any wonder then, that, at the turning point of his career, Mantell more than duplicated the exploit of Heffernan against a gang of ruffians who sought to nullify his acting — as shall be told in its proper place?

The engagement with Heffernan lasted only during the two weeks of the Easter fair, and then Mantell joined Charles Mathews for small parts in "My Awful Dad" and "The Clock-Maker's Hat." This engagement, too, was brief, and the early part of April found the adventurous young actor in the company of Alice Marriott.

CHAPTER X.

Episode of the Four Young Noblemen at Fifteen Shillings a Week, with Other Matters Pertinent to this Biography.

IT was a merry gang of happy-go-lucky vagabonds that constituted Alice Marriott's company. The repertoire of this really accomplished tragedienne was extensive, but the mainstay was "Queen Elizabeth."

Mantell had the rôle of Lord Howard of Effingham. He quickly struck up an intimate friendship with Sir Francis Drake, the Earl of Essex and Francis Lord Bacon. The four noblemen became as inseparable as D'Artagnan and his three comrades, Athos, Porthos and Aramis. Lord Bacon was our old friend Richard Edgar, stage manager at Rochdale — no longer "the great Edgar," but now just an associate actor of normal proportions. The Earl of Essex was, in private life, Mantell's particular chum ("and I loved him like a brother," Mantell told me), Frank Clements, who afterwards won distinction on the stage in America. Sir Francis Drake be-

came, in the wings, plain Gerald Eyre, if so romantic a real name can be called plain.

These noblemen had fallen on evil days since the intriguing times of good Queen Bess, when they held all England in the hollow of their hands. Their average earnings now were only fifteen shillings a week. But no one, seeing them in their gorgeous stage attire, would have guessed it. They were even more suave and polite and prosperous looking than in the days of the Spanish Armada.

Outside the theatre, the difference was apparent. It was no uncommon sight to behold the four friends trudging along the street to their lodgings, Lord Howard with a loaf of bread under his arm, Sir Francis Drake with a joint of meat, Lord Bacon with a string of sausages, and the Earl of Essex with a bunch of onions. They themselves realized how far they had fallen in the social scale when even the majority of cheap inns closed their doors to peers of the realm, and often forced them to hunt for hours when they struck a new town for a place to put up for the night.

One day the four noblemen, then playing in Hull, decided to improve their fortunes. Sir Francis Drake, whose "head for figures" had caused him to be appointed treasurer of the quartet, lashed his brain into a

financial delirium, during the course of which he came to the conclusion that he had discovered a way to "beat the races." He announced to his associates so confidently that he knew "all about the horses" that he convinced them. They, accordingly, scraped all their savings together, and took a trap to the race track eight miles away.

When they got there, they all turned over their money to Sir Francis. He, with a smile of superior and supreme confidence, bided his time, and then laid every penny on a "dead sure thing." The horse nonchalantly strolled under the wire fifth or sixth.

The smile on Sir Francis' face vanished as quickly as if Queen Elizabeth had suddenly turned off the electric current of her favors. Clouds gathered on the brows of the other three noblemen, but scarcely a mutter of thunder was heard.

They were eight miles from Hull, and the evening performance was less than four hours off. There was no money in pocket to pay for a trap in advance, and none at home to pay the driver on arrival. The four noblemen did the only thing left—they girded up their loins and started for Hull after the manner of pilgrims of old.

Away they trudged across ditches and through ploughed fields, taking advantage of

every short cut they could discover. Never in the days when intrigue ran the highest was Sir Francis Drake so unpopular as on that dusty afternoon of early summer.

They reached the theatre only a few minutes before time for the curtain, and quickly exchanged their travel-stained garments for the regal attire of the Court of Elizabeth. Nobody in the audience that night suspected how hungry and footsore were Lord Howard of Effingham, Sir Francis Drake, Francis Lord Bacon and the Earl of Essex.

On the night of his *début* with Miss Marriott, Robert Mantell—or Robert Hudson, as he was still calling himself—had the second and last real stage fright of his life. The first, it will be remembered, was on the night of the première of “*The Merchant of Venice*” at Rochdale.

Shakespeare again was responsible. The play was “*Hamlet*.” Mantell was cast for Francisco. To him and Bernardo fell the duty of breaking the ice. Mantell remembered his Rochdale experience, and felt nervous. Just before time for the curtain to go up, he sought out the property man. He slipped a shilling into a hand that, from long experience, closed automatically over the coin, and whispered:

“Turn the gas as low as you can.”

The property man, without a why or wherefore, did as he was told. But he turned the flame too low, and the swish of the curtains in parting blew it out. Hamlet's father's ghost was forced to come untimely from his dread abode and relight it.

The humor of the situation touched Mantell on his ever-present funny spot and he forgot his fears. From that moment to this, he has been a good "first nighter." Many a time he has been violently nervous, but the nervousness has always put fire into his veins. When much has depended on a new venture, he has been so excited he could not eat, but hunger has had on him the savage effect it exerts on the tiger.

Mantell rose rapidly in the good graces of Miss Marriott. From Francisco, with whom he doubled Guildenstern, the second actor and the priest, she promoted him to the ghost, and when she staged "Macbeth" she assigned to him the parts of Ross and Malcolm.

But the climax of her favors came a few months later, after he had finished his first tour with her, when she re-engaged him especially for the rôle of Richard the Lion-Hearted in a new production of "Ivanhoe."

The first performance was in Liverpool.

Mantell was in his glory. He strutted on to the stage and spoke his lines with all the unction of his best days in Robert Houston's elocution school in Belfast.

When he walked off to the delightful music of the first vigorous round of applause he had ever earned, he was met in the wings by Miss Marriott in the garb of Rebecca.

"You're doing fine, Bobbie," she whispered proudly, "but," she added delicately, "remember, lad, Richard was an English king, not an Irish schoolmaster."

During the Christmas season of 1877, just previous to this second engagement with Miss Marriott, Mantell played in pantomime at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Here occurred the first of a series of love adventures that have made Mantell's stage career so picturesque in the eyes of the feminine half of humanity.

He fell desperately in love with a young girl of wealthy family, and she returned his affection just as desperately. But papa was more desperate still. He had no more use for stage vagabonds than the majority of fond fathers in rural Britain in that day. Mantell, though of Scotch blood, had all the romance of Italy in his veins. Not content with meeting his lady love discreetly, he conceived the brilliant idea of

serenading her at her home, and one night put the idea into effect.

Father-in-law-not-to-be had ideas of his own about the romantic customs of Italy. He threatened to shoot the impassioned young serenader if he didn't cease his "screeching" and "caterwauling," as he was unsympathetic enough to term the exquisite tenor vocalizations, and all but carried out the threat.

Mantell left Newcastle-on-Tyne with a broken heart. But it was not primarily to bind together the shattered fragments that he went to Glasgow. He had been engaged by Miss Ellen Wallis, a capable actress-manager, for "responsible business," and it was to fill this engagement that he returned to his native Scotland. He was not long with Miss Wallis, however, before his former manager, Miss Marriott, drafted him for her production of "Ivanhoe," launched in Liverpool, as has already been related.

Mantell's engagement in Liverpool marked a turning point in his career. For it was in this metropolis of Western England that H. J. Sargent, then abroad looking for talent to support Mme. Modjeska on an ambitious American tour, saw the handsome young Scotchman. Sargent was not long in placing him under contract at

twenty-five dollars a week, which looked like a huge sum alongside the four dollars he had been receiving, and the eight or ten dollars he was getting now.

Upon concluding his Liverpool engagement with Miss Marriott, Mantell went to his old home in Belfast to spend the summer before starting for the New World, again to seek his fortune, but this time with better prospects of success. He had gained now a foothold on the stage, though, as yet, the future looked none too bright to a Scotch instinct of thriftiness. England held promise only of slow advancement. America, in spite of the Boston disaster, was a land of golden dreams.

And so it came about that on October 30, 1878, Robert Mantell again set sail across the Atlantic, on the steamer *Helvetia*. And this brings us up to Chapter I of this authentic biography, in which is recorded the disaster of the revenue cutter *Fanny*.

Robert Mantell's adventures from now on belong chiefly to America. We shall accompany him back to the Old World for an exciting or an amusing experience or two, but for the most part we must zigzag with him across this continent.

CHAPTER XI.

First Impressions of America by the Blonde Tybalt.

ON the very opening night of his engagement in America at the old Leyland Opera House in Albany Robert Mantell excited the admiration of the one person whose opinion counted with him just then more than that of anybody else — Mme. Modjeska herself. The play was "Romeo and Juliet." Mantell was the Tybalt. Instead of making up with the traditional black wig, Mantell presented Tybalt in his own natural blonde curly hair.

"You are charming," said Modjeska, with her little sprightly jerk. "You are a stunner, and should not be killed."

Long years afterward the mature Mantell returned the compliment in these words:

"Mme. Modjeska was the loveliest star I ever supported. She was a sweet, good woman, and an artist to her finger tips."

On this opening night in Albany, Mantell played for the first time under his own name. Heretofore he had always appeared as Robert Hudson. Sargent was responsible for the change.

"What shall we call you on the program?" he asked Mantell.

"Robert Hudson, I suppose," was the reply; "that's what I have been calling myself all along."

"But your own name is more distinctive," said Sargent; "there are hundreds of Hudsons in America."

"All right," returned the actor, "put it Mantell. We are a long way from Belfast."

And Mantell it has been ever since. And it wasn't many years before his brilliant success caused his family to forgive the "disgrace" into which he had plunged the name.

Apropos of Modjeska and "Romeo and Juliet," Mr. Mantell was an eye witness of an amusing incident in London a few years later, when Shakespeare's Italian romance was being played with Modjeska as Juliet and Forbes-Robertson as Romeo.

It was the scene in which Romeo and Count Paris, played on this occasion by Herbert Standing, fight the duel at the tomb of Juliet. Romeo had just slain the unfortunate young nobleman and had placed him, in accordance with his dying request, by the side of the rigid Juliet, when the dim lamp over the scene flickered up and set fire to some drapery.

Romeo tried, with as little departure

from the poetry of the situation as possible, to put out the fire. Juliet, with iron nerve, retained her pose of death, in spite of the fact that the drapery was burning directly above her and a detached bit of the flaming cloth might drop on her at any moment. Count Paris, however, was seized with nervous qualms. He picked himself up and quietly stole away. Then, a stage hand with a long hook gathered in the burning drapery and easily extinguished the fire. Thereupon, Count Paris, amid the titters of the audience, quietly glided back, lay down and died a second time, and the pathetic scene went on.

Robert Mantell kept a diary of his first tour of America. It was the first and only diary he ever kept in his life. As a veracious biographer, I am compelled to state that it resembles more the diary of Samuel Clemens than that of Samuel Pepys.

You remember the extract Mark Twain published from the diary he started in his boyhood days, at the instigation of a pious aunt or some other relative, who thought it would be the making of him, if he could turn his hare brain to serious introspection, and record his daily deeds and thoughts. The result ran like this:

Monday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Tuesday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Wednesday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Thursday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Friday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Next Friday — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Friday fortnight — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Following month — Got up, washed, went to bed.

Now, compare this extract from Robert Mantell's diary of his voyage to America:

Nov. 1 — Fine weather.

Nov. 2 — Fine weather.

Nov. 3 — Fine weather. Passed sailing ship.

Nov. 4 — Blowing pretty hard.

Nov. 5 — The sea going down. Rolling yet. Fog whistle.

Nov. 6 — Nearly calm.

Nov. 7 — Cold and cloudy.

Nov. 8 — A little stormy. Passed two steamers. Very stormy at night.

Nov. 9 — Awful stormy.

Nov. 10 — The sea has gone down, and our bark goes well.

Or, better still, take this extract:

Mar. 3 — Terre Haute, Indiana — Small place.

Mar. 4 — Lafayette, Indiana — Small place.

Mar. 5 — Fort Wayne, Indiana — Small place.

Mar. 6 — Springfield, Ohio — Small place.

But this waste of inanities, which is a sample of ninety-nine out of a hundred diaries kept by ambitious youth wishing to curry favor in the eyes of their elders, is relieved here and there by an interesting observation or adventure.

On January 6, the young Scotchman found Baltimore a "great place for oysters." The next week he visited our beloved Washington City, whose White House and Capitol and Monument inspire such surges of patriotism in the breasts of the youth of America. He found it a "great place for oysters and ten pins." That is his entire impression, as recorded in his diary.

He was "greatly disappointed" in New Orleans and "wouldn't live in it for anything," and Pittsburg (which then had not arrived at the dignity of the final "h") was, as he expressed it, a "dirty hole." The mature Mantell has changed his opinion of both these cities.

He was favorably impressed with Indianapolis, which appeared "something like Belfast," and Louisville he found "a very nice city." Cincinnati was "one of the most ungodly places he was ever in."

In Kalamazoo he ate frogs for the first

time and found them "splendid." In Detroit he got his first taste of real American winter. In Grand Rapids he enjoyed his first sleigh ride—"great value!" he exclaims.

At Norfolk, Mme. Modjeska invited him to go aboard the American flagship, *Pocahontas*, with her, and he found the trip very interesting. At Savannah, he and a number of other members of the company went horseback riding. Atlanta he describes as "a busy place."

Near Montgomery, Alabama, he experienced his first railroad wreck, and the only one to date in his entire career. The private car in which Modjeska and her company traveled ran off the track and came near plunging down an embankment. Count Bozenta, husband of the star, an important little man, ran about highly excited when the danger was all over, much to the aggravation of Modjeska and the amusement of everybody else.

In Memphis, Mantell experienced his first hotel fire. "Don't like this town at all," is the entry in the diary. "Will be glad to leave it. Fire in the hotel. Devil of a fright. I shall never forget this place as long as I live. One cannot imagine what a fright one gets when the hotel is on fire. I don't wish it to occur again." For the

benefit of the superstitious, it might be added that it was the thirteenth of a month — February, 1879.

St. Louis impressed the youthful visitor as a "very important city." "Some say," he adds, "that the population is larger than Chicago."

Chicago is given more space in the diary than any other city. The company remained here two weeks. "We are doing splendid business," says our chronicler. "Indeed, we do good business everywhere. As for the city, it's one of the finest, in my humble opinion, I have seen. The hotels are the finest I ever saw. I went to church on Sunday. It was the finest Presbyterian church I ever saw. There were fifty in the choir. The preaching was good and the singing elegant. Our time was very pleasantly spent one way or another in Chicago."

It is recorded that "nothing wonderful happened" in Rochester. There was "plenty of rain" in Syracuse. "One of the finest hotels in America" was visited in Utica. "One of the worst hotels anywhere" was encountered next day in Troy.

Boston had "greatly improved" since his visit there five years before, when, for ten days, he had trudged the streets in search of work. Rosy spectacles, doubtless. But the thing that impressed the

diarist most was the fact that there were 38,000 more women than men in the New England metropolis.

From Boston, Modjeska jumped to New York. "Fine city, I am delighted with it," says the diary. At the Grand Opera House on the night of April 28, 1879, Robert Mantell made his first appearance in the capital of New World theatredom. His first part in New York was Old Dill in "East Lynn." Mme. Modjeska hated this play to the bottom of her artistic soul, but it was a money-maker, and she chose it for her opening bill in New York. Mantell was greeted here by a number of his old friends from Belfast who had emigrated to America, and they showed him a royal good time.

A brief trip through New England—Providence, Springfield, Hartford and New Haven—ended the tour. "The scenery about these places," says the diary, "is more like England's than any in America."

Here is the summing up of this first season in America by the young Scotch actor, who was destined, long after, to take his place as the foremost classic tragedian on the stage of the New World. It is dated at Springfield, May 14:

"As our tour ends, all our company feel sorry, for it has been most enjoyable. Every comfort one can wish for we have

had. We did all our tour in a very handsome palace car. The gentlemen of the company were all splendid fellows. Can't say much about the ladies. Modjeska (Countess Bozenta), our star, was all one could ask for in goodness, etc. As for H. J. Sargent, our manager, I never knew a finer fellow."

On May 17, Mantell sailed for home on the *Helvetia*, the same steamer that had rammed the *Fanny* coming out. Mantell seems to have been her "hoodoo." There was a fog. "We got stuck on Sandy Hook," says the diary.

"Yes, and to pick a pocket," remarked to me the tragedian, thirty-five years later, sitting on the cool porch of his summer home at Atlantic Highlands and gazing out toward the sickle of land across which swept the Atlantic breezes that were so refreshing to us, while New York, twenty miles away, sweltered in the August sun, "I have been stuck on Sandy Hook ever since."

CHAPTER XII.

Last Days in the Old World, Terminating with the Episode of the Beautiful Gypsy Stage Queen.

IN spite of the favorable impression America had made upon him, in spite of the opportunities opened up in this country after his successful tour with Modjeska, Robert Mantell found it no easy matter to tear himself away from the motherland. His months of absence had made him homesick. He hoped against conviction that fortune would smile brightly upon him in his own hemisphere.

Accordingly, less than two months after landing in England, he joined the company of the distinguished actor-manager, George S. Knight. With Knight he toured for more than a year, playing fairly good parts, but drawing a meagre salary. When Knight appeared at the Theatre Royal, Belfast, he complimented the young actor by assigning to him in his home city the rôle of Iago to Frank Clement's Othello. This was Mantell's first appearance as Iago, a rôle in which he afterwards, as a star, won extraordinary distinction in America, alternating it with the Moor.

It was with Knight that Mantell made his first appearance in London in July, 1880, playing at the famous Sadler's Wells, where, from 1844 to 1862, Samuel Phelps had made the brilliantly successful experiment of producing all of the plays of Shakespeare, except "Henry VI," "Troilus and Cressida," "Titus Andronicus" and "Richard II." (Incidentally, it may be remarked, Mr. Mantell considers Samuel Phelps the most magnificent Cardinal Richelieu he ever saw.)

With Knight, Mantell not only acted, but also assisted in the management of the stage, and there laid the groundwork for the extraordinary technical knowledge with which he has since, on many occasions, astounded experienced carpenters and electricians in his employ. They have sometimes declared certain effects sought by the star to be impossible. Mantell has, on such occasions, taken into his own hands the saw or hatchet or rope or electric lamp and shown how easily the effect can be produced.

To this side of Mantell's experience with Knight belongs a good story illustrating the sanguinity of youth.

It was just before the Christmas season at Stockton-on-Tees. As in America at the present time, the few days before Christmas are wretchedly bad in the theatre, everybody spending their money for gifts. Knight

disbanded his company for the dull period. The players scattered in all directions, leaving Mantell and Archie Lindsay, a fellow actor and mechanician, to look after the baggage and effects.

Lindsay resembled the merry, diabolical Panurge of Rabelais, in that he had a coat studded wonderfully with pockets. A careful inventory revealed twenty-eight. Their main purpose was to accommodate Lindsay's "sandwiches," as he termed little flat flasks of Scotch whiskey.

The baggage was sent to Stockton-on-Tees, and thither went Mantell and Lindsay. They arrived at night. The baggage had been unloaded on the station platform by the trainmen. A light snow was falling, and there were no carts anywhere in sight.

"You stay here and watch the stuff, and I'll go hunt some kind of a wagon to get it in out of the wet," said Lindsay to Mantell. "And you'd better take another 'sandwich' to keep out the cold."

"All right," Mantell assented, to both propositions.

It wasn't cold, in spite of the snow, and Mantell nestled comfortably among the trunks and bags to await Lindsay's return. Presently he fell asleep.

The next thing he knew, Lindsay was shaking him roughly.

"Wake up, Bob; here's a telegram for you," he said.

Mantell sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he took the telegram, and tore it open sleepily. But the contents, read by the dim light from the station window, electrified him:

"Have to go to the Continent for a few weeks. Will you come immediately to London and play my parts?"

"HENRY IRVING."

Mantell was dumbfounded. But thrills of happiness chased each other up and down his spine. The great Irving, then, had seen him act! Irving, of all men, had discovered in him genius!

"What must I do?" he asked Lindsay.

"Do, y' ninny? Go, of course!"

"All right, and you're coming along," said Mantell.

A London-bound train whistled down the track. The two young actors hastily picked their own luggage out of the heap before them, and when the train puffed up, they sprang into a compartment, leaving Knight's effects to shift for themselves.

On arriving in London, they went to apartments Lindsay had formerly occupied. Mantell, in his excitement, knew it would be useless to go to bed. He decided to "brush up" on *Hamlet*. The porter had

just brought his little wardrobe trunk. Mantell opened it. He had been robbed! The Hamlet compartment was empty, except for the skull of Yorick. He picked up the skull. A folded paper fell out. He opened it and read:

"Telegram all a joke."

He turned on Lindsay, who had a grin all over his face. He picked up the skull angrily, and hurled it with all his force at the head of the practical joker. He missed his aim. The skull hit the wall, and was shivered in a hundred pieces.

The clatter really woke up the dreamer this time. He was lying amid the baggage on the station platform. Lindsay was coming up with a handcart he had borrowed. The rattle of the iron wheels on the cobblestones resembled the clatter of the shattered skull. It had been one of those peculiar dreams in which the dreamer dreams he is awake.

But stay — was there nothing more in it than an idle dream? Did not it reveal to the young actor, more clearly than anything else could have done, the secret, subconscious confidence he had in his ability? He could play Irving's parts, if he had the chance! This confidence in himself, combined with an iron determination to realize the best that was in him, caused Robert

Mantell in later years to overcome obstacles that heaped themselves before him like the granite sides of impassable mountains.

Mantell's engagement with Knight came to an end after the London run. He took lodgings in the great city at half a crown a week, and, as his savings from the lean salary he had received the past year were small, he lived very economically on bacon, bread, and watercress.

He discovered during this period a new way of fooling his stomach. He would stand before a restaurant, feast on the odors coming from the good things cooking inside, rolling a small piece of tobacco about in his mouth at the same time, and presently walk away with the impression he had had a square meal. Verily, a strong imagination was a valuable asset to a young actor in those days.

Stage work was scarce in London that summer, and Mantell could find nothing to do. His savings gradually dwindled down to a three-penny bit, which had the misfortune to be made of lead in place of silver. He walked boldly into a tobacco shop and asked for an ounce of black twist. The proprietor, an evil-faced individual, cut off the amount as carefully as Shylock, and wrapped it up. Mantell put the package into his pocket, laid the three-penny bit on

image

not

available

there. It was not sealed. He opened it. His eyes nearly popped from his head. There before him were 200 pounds in Bank of England notes.

His struggle with himself was of only a moment's duration. Then he ran after the two women. He caught up with them as they were entering a cab.

"Did you drop something?" he asked.

The women went through their effects. Then, one of them exclaimed excitedly:

"Oh, the money! It was in a blue envelope! Two hundred pounds! Give it to me, quick!"

Mantell handed the envelope to her. She hastily drew out the money and counted it. There was a great sigh of relief.

"Yes! It's all there! Drive on, cabby!"

"Not so much as a 'thank you,'" mused Mantell. "But, I wasn't a thief, anyhow. That's some consolation."

He started slowly and aimlessly down the street, musing on the ingratitude of some people.

"Hello, Mantell!" yelled a voice with a familiar ring. "Want a job?"

He looked up quickly. There stood an actor named Somerset whom he had known the few weeks he had played with Miss Wallis.

"Do I want a job? Do I want a — Sure thing, you idiot! What is it?"

image

not

available

school books, however, I would caution the editor to be discreetly silent about the leaden nickel our hero was trying to pass on an innocent tobacconist awhile ago. No use tainting a story which contains so beautiful a lesson.

Mantell joined Miss Wallis at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, and played with her successfully not only *Orlando*, but also Claude Melnotte, in "*The Lady of Lyons*," and *Romeo*.

It was while playing *Romeo* with Miss Wallis just before Christmas that there happened one of those amusing incidents so pat that they are scarcely credible. And yet, any veteran of the stage can recall two or three similar ones in his own experience.

Mantell and Miss Wallis were doing the balcony scene. They had reached the climax of luxurious Italian passion.

"I would I were thy bird," uttered *Romeo*, deliciously.

Juliet had opened her sweet lips to reply, when there was a raucous "Quack! Quack!" and a great fat goose came fluttering clumsily from the glorious Italian sky. It hit the floor, and waddled off into the wings in awkward excitement.

The audience howled, and the curtain had to be rung down. Miss Wallis burst into tears and became hysterical. Whipping

out a little penknife, she started on a hunt for the goose, with the full intention of slitting its ill-starred throat. But the stage hands, to whom the bird belonged, had smuggled it away.

The goose was being fattened for Christmas. It had become a great pet around the theatre, and was given the freedom of the stage when the men were at work between performances. On this particular night, the stage hands had forgotten to pen it up before raising the curtain. The goose had wandered up into the paint loft with the scenic artist. With an instinct almost fiendish, it had tumbled from its perch at the most inopportune moment of the entire play.

The following February, 1881, Mantell renewed his contract with Miss Wallis, including in it, for small rôles, Marie Sheldon, his newly acquired bride, whom he had met some time before in Glasgow. This arrangement continued until about Easter, when Mantell joined the famous actor-manager and dramatist, Dion Boucicault, with whom he played juvenile leads in a series of revivals of Boucicault's own plays, "The Shaughraun," "The Colleen Bawn" and "Kerry."

After four weeks with Boucicault in Sheffield, Liverpool, Leeds and Birming-

ham, Mantell rejoined Miss Wallis to create the part of Paul in a new stage version of "Paul and Virginia." The play was a failure, but Mantell remained for a time with Miss Wallis, appearing in his former rôles and adding Benedict.

Early in 1882, Mantell began an engagement as leading man with the most picturesque star he supported in his entire career — Marie De Grey, an extraordinarily beautiful woman of gypsy blood. The feature of her repertoire was a gorgeous production of "Amy Robsart," dramatized from Scott. She had, of course, the title part, and Mantell played the Earl of Leicester.

Perhaps never, on the English stage, was seen so glorious a creature as Amy, with her sparkling black eyes, her curly raven hair, and her gown lavish in color, gold and lace to the point of barbarism.

Mantell instantly, with his handsome face and form, won the admiration of the temperamental gypsy. She gave him every rôle in which she thought he would shine — Romeo, Orlando, Charles Surface and Young Marlow, in addition to Leicester. She paid him eight pounds a week, an unusual salary then for a provincial leading man.

So lavish was she with her praise of his acting and her efforts to advance him in

the good graces of their audiences, that, when the time came for him to leave her, he was put in a delicate position, from which, in spite of his usual tact and diplomacy, he did not succeed in extricating himself without a scene.

The rupture came on the night of August 12 in Hull. Marie De Grey had put on a production of "Macbeth" to give her young leading man a chance as the Thane. There had been only three days' rehearsal, and Mantell remembers the performance as a "particularly awful" one. Marie De Grey, however, had only words of praise after the fall of the last curtain. In the midst of the exchange of compliments, for Mantell was not to be left behind in an affair of courtesy and was bestowing on Lady Macbeth the same sort of adulation the Thane of Cawdor was receiving, the young actor announced, as delicately as he could, that he had been called to America, and must soon sail. The gypsy was at first stunned, and then she flew into a passion and a violent quarrel followed.

Five days later, Robert Mantell boarded a steamer at Queenstown. He never saw Marie De Grey again. Nor ever again did he play in the British Isles, except for a few nights the following summer of 1883 at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow. The play

was called, appropriately enough, "The Old Love and the New." He was discarding forever the Old World — hereafter, he belongs exclusively to the New.

CHAPTER XIII.

Leaping into a Blaze of Glory.

ROBERT MANTELL was soon to score in America the tremendous hit that made him the idol of the hour, and that established his name forever in the hall of theatrical fame. But the triumph was deferred for a year.

The "call to America," which had served an effective purpose in the scene with the gypsy star, had been made by the theatrical magnate Stetson, who planned to establish a Shakespearean stock company in his New York theatre. He had engaged Mantell for leading parts and Marie Sheldon for minor rôles, at a combined salary of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week, a figure that seemed scarcely believable to the young actor.

Stetson's plans fell through in the early autumn. Brooks and Dickson, however, who were on the lookout for an actor of the type of Mantell for the part of Sir Clement Huntingford in their new melodrama, "The World," gladly took the contract off Stetson's hands. Mantell opened at the Grand

Opera House shortly afterward. It was the first time he had played a leading part in America.

The stay of "The World" in New York was brief. It was sent on tour. But Brooks and Dickson recalled Mantell from the road to create Jack Hearn in "The Romany Rye," which endured throughout the season. After a brief visit to Scotland, Mantell returned to New York, and to triumph.

"On the opening night of 'Fedora,' Robert Mantell was the handsomest figure that ever greeted a feminine eye," a woman who was in that audience at the Fourteenth-Street Theatre told me long afterward.

Something like that must have been the case, for Robert Mantell, by the one performance of Loris Ipanoff that red-letter night of October 1, 1883, sprang instantly from obscurity into the full blaze of the limelight. The Fourteenth-Street Theatre thereafter was taxed to the utmost. The handsome young Scotchman was lionized for the season by the dashing crowds of Broadway.

Fanny Davenport had secured from Victorien Sardou the American rights to his new play, "Fedora," by the payment down of a cool thirty-five thousand dollars in cash. She had pawned everything she possessed to raise the money, including a neck-

188220B

lace of twenty-five magnificent diamonds valued at a thousand dollars each.

Miss Davenport, as can well be imagined, was at a high nervous tension on the opening night in New York. Either the romantic Russian play from the pen of the prolific Frenchman must succeed or she must stare pauperism in the face.

The names of Sardou and Davenport filled the theatre with the élite of New York. It looked like a millionaire night at the opera. The audience expected great things — great sensations — great thrills.

The swish of the curtain as it went down on the first act was distinctly audible. There was scarcely a ripple of even polite applause. Decidedly the audience was disappointed. Miss Davenport was gloomy and downcast. Mantell cheered her up the best he could.

The curtain fell on the second act. Again there was no applause. Fanny Davenport was in tears. Her little fortune had been thrown away.

But Mantell became angry. His Scotch blood rose up.

"We'll hit 'em next time, the icebergs!" he said to Miss Davenport, with something near a savage growl in his voice.

The spirit was contagious. The star dried her eyes.



RÔLES IN WHICH MANTELL STARTLED NEW YORK

image

not

available

"All right," she replied, and set her teeth.

The curtain went up. Loris Ipanoff, the outlaw, and Fedora, the tigress, buckled down to work like grim death.

Fedora's lover had been assassinated. Loris, the suspect, had been tracked down, and was now confronted by the woman. She was cross-questioning him.

Yes, he had seen the slain man. He had caught him and his own fiancée together, she sitting on his knee.

The spell of the story was beginning to work. The spirit of the players was crossing the footlights. The audience became tense.

How, now, was Loris Ipanoff going to establish his innocence, after this damning admission?

"I killed him!"

The confession was tremendously startling. It had been wholly unexpected. The audience forgot itself. Scores sprang to their feet and yelled.

"Kill them both! Kill them both!" shrieked Fedora.

Again there was an answering yell from the other side of the footlights.

The play was made!

A few weeks later, Fanny Davenport, one night before the curtain went up, dangled a magnificent diamond necklace in front of Mantell's eyes.

"I got it back," she said, happily.

There is no treason to the memory of Fanny Davenport in asserting that Loris Ipanoff was the making of "Fedora." That is the report of the press of the period and the opinion expressed after all these years by the theatregoers who saw the play in its prime. Miss Davenport herself acknowledged it, and instead of becoming jealous and ridding herself of so "dangerous" a leading man, she raised his salary to a handsome figure.

The estimate in which Mantell was held by universal voice, in the days of "Fedora" and those immediately following, can be gathered from this appreciation of his work from a leading journal glancing at the stars then shining in the New York constellation:

"The stage shows us so many robustuous creatures who tear a passion to pieces and rend the air with a great volume of rhetoric that there is nothing pleasanter in life than to turn from them and grow restful in the natural fire of Mr. Mantell, the ease of Mr. John Gilbert, the artless pleasing of Miss Rehan or the unconscious dignity and grace of Miss Millward. These clever folks have gained eminence by fine talent united to a simple expression of nature in the characters they assume and the emotions they endure.

It requires indeed much art to present this simplicity. For, paradoxical though the statement may seem, there appears to be nothing so hard to humanity as to be natural."

New York, and, through New York, all theatregoing America, worshipped at the shrine of the young Scotch genius who had burst so suddenly from obscurity. The managers were quick to recognize his value from a commercial standpoint. He was besieged with offers. One of them, made by Daniel Frohman at a figure then considered almost fabulous, ten thousand dollars a year, was accepted. A contract was entered into, which was to take effect after the expiration of the engagement of "Fedora." The provisions of the contract, however, were never fully carried out, though Mantell appeared for a time under Frohman's management.

The triumph in "Fedora" was to be repeated long afterward by the very same actor, Robert Bruce Mantell, in another play, "Richard III." Stage history contains no duplicate so strange. The story shall be told in full in its proper turn. I wish merely to touch upon it here to illustrate a point. Mantell, through unfortunate legal proceedings, was shut out of New York for a period of ten years. The great city forgot him. When his difficulties were

image

not

available

Mantell for the leading part. With an intuition that was all but faultless, for which Mackaye was famous, he engaged two other young people, then new to the stage, John Mason and Viola Allen.

On April 6, 1885, "Dakolar" was launched, and the Lyceum was started on its long and honorable career. "Dakolar," like "Called Back," ran eight weeks in New York. Mantell, during the period, added materially to his fame as a matinée idol.

Three months to a day after the dedication of the Lyceum, Mantell was called to Chicago to dedicate another theatre, which also became famous in American stage history, McVicker's. The play was "True Nobility."

"True Nobility" was not a success, and on July 20 it was replaced by "The Marble Heart," which for many years held a prominent place in Mantell's permanent romantic repertoire. With him in the cast, at the first performance in Chicago, were Viola Allen and Herbert Kelcey.

Mantell for months had been anxious to play Charles Surface on this side of the Atlantic. Though "The Marble Heart" was a success, the wishes of the young actor carried so much weight that on August 3 a special production of "The

image

not

available

CHAPTER XIV.

In Which a New Star Bursts into the Firmament of American Theatredom.

AUGUSTUS PITOU, a shrewd showman, had noted the effect of Loris Ipanoff on the hearts of impressionable femininity, and he believed the time to be ripe for the launching of the handsome blonde matinée idol as a star in his own right.

Pitou secured a new romantic play from John Kellar, entitled "Tangled Lives," and on the night of September 16, 1886, at New Haven, Conn., Robert Mantell made his stellar début. The play was well received, and Mantell and Pitou decided it was strong enough for a New York trial. After touring in the vicinity of the metropolis for a few weeks, polishing the piece and getting the company in shape, they opened at the Fifth Avenue Theatre on the night of November 13, ignoring the "hoodoo."

Though "Tangled Lives" did not create any profound sensation among the restless rovers under the white lights, it made a favorable impression, and enjoyed a run of seven weeks. Mantell then played for two

image

not

available

smoke. Not a muscle twitches. The man's nerves are of iron. The audience applauds wildly.

There has been nearly as much speculation over how Mantell did that little bit of cauterizing as there has been over Kellar's levitation trick. Everybody has had his theory. A bit of raw beef and a red hot poker has been the favorite explanation. Others contended for a cold poker and chemicals.

"In reality," Mr. Mantell told me, "I used a very thin but tough piece of leather, which I bound to my arm by a flesh-colored rubber band before putting on any make-up. On this leather I laid a flattened bit of cobblers' wax about the size of a pea. Then I painted my arm, the leather, wax and all, to represent the bite of the dog. The poker actually was heated to a red glow. It was applied carefully to the wax. Of course, there was a sound as of burning flesh and a puff of smoke.

"One night when I was coolly applying the poker to the wound, the red-hot iron slipped, and there was a real sizzling of the flesh. The iron-nerved hero let out a yell of pain that could be heard four blocks, dropped the poker and broke up the scene."

The story of how Mantell and Pitou acquired the stage rights to "Monbars"

has a romantic tinge. There was, in those days, an old French wine merchant in New York named Merabel, whose establishment was a popular resort for stage people. Merabel himself was intensely interested in the theatre, and made it a rule of his life to see that his Thespian friends had the best and most delicate wines obtainable in America and Europe.

A frequenter of this shop was a giant Frenchman by the name of Louis Natal, who might have been the original of Porthos in the D'Artagnan romances. He had the strength of an ox, but — queer as it may sound — he had a brain of equal power and of rare delicacy.

Natal, years before, had written a play which had enjoyed a splendid success in Paris and the French provinces. One day at Merabel's he took Mantell aside and told him confidentially that he had a drama that nobody else on this side of the Atlantic could possibly do.

"I have translated it myself," said Natal, "from a French original I wrote years ago. It has never been done in English that I know of; but if it has, it has been played in a pirated and garbled version. It is just the thing for you."

"All right," said Mantell, with the air soon acquired by a popular star who has a

play thrust under his nose every other day, "bring it over to Pitou's office and I'll read it."

"No you won't," answered Louis, shrewdly recognizing the tone. "I'll read it myself to you and 'Gus.' I tell you, it is something you will want."

Mantell was a little impressed by Natal's manner.

"Very well," he said, "come around tomorrow afternoon, and we'll hear it."

The big Frenchman brought "Monbars" over next day, and read it to the actor and his manager. It sounded fine. Pitou wanted to close a deal at once, but Mantell wished first to consult Archie Lindsay, his old friend of the liquid Scotch "sandwiches," who was then with him in New York. Lindsay had a marvelous memory, and knew everything there was to be known about old plays. Mantell wanted to ask him about a possible earlier English version of the one he had just heard.

Concealing his real desire to see Lindsay, Mantell said he would think the matter over, and invited Natal and Pitou to meet him at the Lambs Club that evening for his answer.

The actor hurried home. He couldn't find Lindsay. The Scotchman's taste for "sandwiches" had allured him to a "banquet."

That evening, Mantell, Pitou and Natal met at the club, and concluded a deal, by which the two partners agreed to pay the Frenchman five hundred dollars down, and twelve and one-half per cent of the gross receipts of every performance of "Monbars."

After the conclusion of this labor, they turned to refreshment. Natal's capacity for wine and stronger liquids was proverbial in Gotham's theatrical circles in those days. Nobody had ever known him to refuse a glass in good fellowship, and yet nobody had ever seen him stagger.

Mantell and Pitou started out to get Natal drunk for once. They entered into a secret conspiracy with the waiter, by which their own drinks were to be diluted to the uttermost point where color could be retained, while Natal's were to be "spiked" heavily with brandy.

Round after round was ordered and drunk, but the Frenchman never faltered. Mantell and Pitou began to feel dizzy, in spite of the fact that the waiter was living strictly up to instructions. Then in their ears began to be heard the roar and buzz that tell the wise man he has had enough liquid joy for one night. But they sat a little longer, and their heads drooped.

Natal, then, with the look of pity the

strong feel for the weakness of mortals not so well constituted, picked up both his friends, tucked one under each arm, carried them down the steps of the club without the slightest tremor of foot, and stowed them safely away in a cab. He paid the driver, and gave him directions as to where he was to set down the revellers.

A few days later, Archie Lindsay turned up.

"Here you are at last, you old Scotch loafer," greeted Mantell. "I've wanted to see you to ask you about a new play I've bought," and he began sketching the story.

A queer light came into Lindsay's eyes.

Mantell went on to relate how the pirate, after numerous adventures, lay on a sick bed, and how a physician came in and proved to him he had been poisoned. The doctor poured a clear acid into a glass from which Monbars had been drinking. The fluid the pirate had thought to be water changed to a jet black.

"What I want to know," said Mantell, "is how I'm going to convert that blasted water into ink. Natal hasn't given any directions."

"Wait, Bob, and I'll show you," said Lindsay.

He went over to a huge trunk filled with odds and ends, and took out a great pile of

image

not

available

given on the night of March 13, 1888, and the run continued well into May.

The New York première was scheduled for the evening of March 12, but on that day there blew up one of the hardest blizzards that ever struck Manhattan. Excessive snow accompanied the high wind. Mantell and Pitou lived opposite each other on Ninety-fifth Street. They managed to get down town on the last elevated train that succeeded in running that evening. Only one other player reached the theatre. This faithful disciple of Roscius had put on a pair of high boots, and, in spite of the whirling wind, had ploughed his way through snow knee-deep the entire distance from Sixty-sixth Street. He was Ben Ringold — "dear old Ben," as Mantell remembers him — and he deserves a monument to his memory.

While on the subject of the romantic plays that filled up the first period of Mantell's career as a star, it may be as well to tell here an amusing story of "The Veiled Picture," though chronologically it belongs three or four years later.

"The Veiled Picture" held an important place in the romantic repertoire, but Mantell always dreaded to play it. He regarded it as his "hoodoo." Something always went wrong during a performance.

"The Veiled Picture" told the story of a conscience-stricken artist. He had killed a man and married his victim's sister. The sister, not suspecting the author of the crime, had employed a detective to ferret out the murderer. The detective got on the track of the criminal through a weird freak of psychology. The artist became the victim of hallucinations. An invisible force guided his brush, compelling him to paint into every picture a raised hand holding a dagger. When the fit had passed, the artist would destroy the painting. But the detective finally got hold of one of these pictures. The "business" of the play was to bring it onto the stage, and confront the murderer with it.

On the very first night of this Zolaesque drama in Reading, Pa., Albert Bruning, who played the detective, couldn't find the picture at the critical moment. He ran to the property room, all excited, and told the property man to give him anything with a frame around it. The property man hastily thrust a picture into his hands, and Bruning, without looking at it, threw a veil over it, and ran onto the stage just in time to escape missing his cue.

He set the veiled picture on a chair with its back to the audience, but accidentally between the audience and a strong light.

Mantell, as the guilty artist, and Charlotte Behrens, as the wife and sister, were placed before it.

"Did you paint this picture?" asked the detective.

"I did," replied the artist.

"Then you are the murderer!" thundered the sleuth, tearing away the veil.

Mantell snorted, Miss Behrens giggled, and the audience roared. For the thin cardboard on which the picture was printed was translucent, and the strong light revealed to the audience a cheap, highly colored litho of President Garfield, and the legend, in great letters: USE GARFIELD TEA.

"I deserve to be hanged if I painted that," whispered Mantell to Bruning.

image

not

available

The play, this time, was "Othello." Remembering his good luck with "Monbars" at the start of the season, he returned to Reading, Pa., for the venture. Reading was a favorite "dog town" in those days. Here, on the night of February 18, 1888, he played Othello for the first time on any stage. It will be remembered that, through the courtesy of George S. Knight, he had played Iago in his home city, Belfast. But this was the first time he had ever attempted the Moor.

The mysterious, intangible verdict of the audience, by which a sensitive actor knows whether he has scored a success or a failure, was favorable, and "Othello" has had a place in Mantell's repertoire ever since. It is the veteran play of his present extensive list of classics.

Mantell's last act of "Othello," matured by more than a quarter of a century of frequent playing, has become, in my opinion, the finest piece of stage artistry he or any other actor of his generation has exhibited. When I saw it the first time, I was dazed by its matchless power and beauty. In reviewing the performance for a newspaper the next morning, I wrote some paragraphs which pleased the tragedian and which served as my letter of introduction to him. From this introduction came the friendship

image

not

available

ashes in the fires of the genius of Shakespeare in the final scene of this great tragedy. Othello soliloquizing is a giant among the pigmy creations of modern technique, and blank verse is only the great voice of great emotions.

"Mr. Mantell was truly Shakespearean in this tremendous act. His powerful voice rolled through the long gamut of passions with the thunder of Shakespeare's poetry, and his frame shook with the terror of the mighty deed of punishment inflicted on the supposedly faithless Desdemona.

"A deadly stillness hung over the audience during the long soliloquy preceding the act of sacrifice, in which he laid bare his soul and justified the approaching deed in the light of his understanding. Then when Desdemona awoke and greeted her lord with childish innocence and playfulness, stifled sobs were heard — and Shakespeare dead these three hundred years, and 'Othello' a victim of the life-sapping commentators!

"Then Othello warned Desdemona with infinite sorrow — infinite because pityingly stern — and eyes unaccustomed to tears became wet. And then he strangled her, and the horror of it burned, and burned, and burned.

"Mr. Mantell had achieved another tri-

umph. He had risen superior to the blight of sophistication, and had made the passions of Shakespeare live."

A number of amusing incidents have enlivened the quarter of a century of Mr. Mantell's presentation of "Othello" on the stage.

Once in Toronto, after a performance of the play, the tragedian was the guest of honor, at a fashionable reception. There he met a very appreciative young woman of the gushing type.

"Oh, Mr. Mantell," she broke out immediately, after the introduction, "I just dote on your Othello! I think it so thrilling and so artistic! You strike me as being so wonderfully conscientious, too!"

"Yes, Madame," replied the tragedian, gravely, and with his most courtly bow, "I try to do everything thoroughly. I am so sincere in Othello that I do not stop with staining my face and hands and arms, but I blacken my whole body."

"Oh, Mr. Mantell!" cried the sweet young thing, with a flutter of alarm, "I hope you didn't catch cold on your way over here. For you must have taken a bath before you left the theatre!"

Another night in Ottawa, the magnificently tense last scene of "Othello" was on. Charlotte Behrens (the second Mrs.

Mantell) was the Desdemona. A "super" behind the scenes became interested. He edged farther and farther out of the wings at the rear of the stage, until he came half in view of the audience behind the bed of Desdemona.

"Get back!" whispered the girl wife about to be strangled.

The "super" didn't move — he didn't realize the whisper was addressed to him.

Then Othello tried it.

"By heaven," he said to Desdemona, "I saw my handkerchief in's hand." — Then, in a menacing whisper to the "super": "You cursed idiot, get off!"

Still no result.

"O perjur'd woman!" — Then, "Back, you blankety-blank fool!"

"Thou dost stone my heart" — "I tell you, get back!"

"And make'st me call what I intend to do a murder!"

He was edging toward the "super," and he whispered to Desdemona, who was now giggling to herself in spite of her impending doom: "And, believe me, it will be a murder!"

"Which I thought a sacrifice," continued Othello, getting closer and closer to his prey.

"I saw the handerchief!" he shouted

ferociously at Desdemona, punctuating his elocution with a swift kick, delivered behind the bed, so the audience couldn't see it.

The absorbed, bulging-eyed "super" gave one wild yelp of terror, and sprang like a hound for the stage door, through which he disappeared, costume and all.

Two years later, Mr. Mantell, on his return to Ottawa, asked the "super captain" about him.

"Guess he's still running, governor," answered that official.

During an engagement in Portland, Maine, Harry Keefer, who has been Mr. Mantell's stage manager from time immemorial, and who knows every streak of paint on every shred of scenery of all the productions, was sent on to New York to make arrangements for the opening of a hurriedly booked engagement at the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre.

In a tense moment of "Othello," the sounding of a gong creates on the audience a profound impression. So important is it that this gong sound at exactly the right second, that Mr. Keefer always stands beside the big suspended brass bell that once belonged to the elder Salvini, and personally superintends the striking of it.

Before leaving for New York, Keefer had cautioned his "under-study" particularly

about this effect. Every one on the stage knew about it, and Mr. Mantell himself made it his business before going on for the scene to see that the assistant stage manager was in place and ready.

Every one off the scene congregated about the bell to see that nothing went wrong. The young man holding the muffled hammer naturally felt a little nervous. The critical moment came. The young man struck — and missed the bell by an inch! Before he could recover, the "cue" was passed, and the audience didn't get its thrill — but Mr. Mantell did!

Though "Othello" had succeeded at the first performance in Reading, Mantell and Pitou knew that a repertoire made up exclusively of the classics would not then be profitable in the hands of the young romantic actor.

Accordingly, they secured the rights to "The Corsican Brothers," which had just been made from Dumas' sensational novel. The première occurred in Philadelphia. The receipts for the week reached what was then an enormous total, and what is still good business, in spite of myths about continuous fifteen and eighteen-thousand-dollar weeks, \$7,677.53. This was the largest business to which Mantell had yet played, and was the largest for some years to come.

image

not

available

until he is fifty," Mr. Mantell told me during the course of the first newspaper interview I ever had with him, "and then he is too old for the part."

The statement is, in a way, an answer to a certain amount of adverse criticism that has been offered in late years in the controversy over the artistic value of his mature Hamlet. Few have questioned the exquisite music of his reading of the lines. Practically all of the adverse critics have set forth the objection that he is too robust and athletic for the part. The objection, even if just, is comparatively trivial, since the beauty of a play so frankly philosophical as "Hamlet" lies more in the beauty of elocution than in external realism so much in vogue in this period of theatrical history.

Even Mr. Mantell may not be quite right in his assumption that the freshness of youth is essential to Hamlet. Hamlet is a philosophical puzzle rather than a flesh-and-blood personage. He is young in years, but hoary headed in philosophy — young as Romeo in romance, but old as Lear in suffering.

In the course of three centuries, no two persons have been found to agree precisely on any point regarding the Dane. Shakespeare himself probably didn't know exactly what he was doing when he wrote the play,



any more than Coleridge realized the trend of his genius when he dreamed "Kubla Kahn" or Poe when he feverishly dashed off "Ulalume."

"Hamlet" is the only play in Mr. Mantell's present classic repertoire in which his supremacy on the contemporary American stage is questioned by critics competent to judge. *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Brutus*, *Shylock* and *Richelieu* are his in the face of more or less formidable opposition. *King Lear*, *Richard III* and *Louis XI* are his by the power of a genius that has excluded competition.

But it is not the purpose of this book to become critical. It is my task, rather, to relate events, and so I pass on to an anecdote of "Hamlet" in the days when the Dane was a mere child in Mantell's repertoire.

The great Booth had just died. Every actor on the American stage doing classic rôles was trying to qualify as his successor in "Hamlet." Mantell was billed for his first performance in Kansas City as the Dane. It would be a tremendous triumph if he should be chosen by critics in a city of such consequence as the actor upon whose shoulders had fallen the mantle of Booth. Thus he mused as he sat in his room at the Coates House, looking across at the theatre where he was to play.

It was about six o'clock in the evening. A crowd began collecting in front of the theatre. It got larger and larger. Mantell grew excited. The crowd continued to increase, and became noisier and noisier and more and more enthusiastic. Mantell couldn't stand it any longer. He decided to go over to his dressing room early and make up with special care.

As he passed through the crowd, he heard three or four people say to each other, "There goes Mantell!" The words were delicious music to his ears. His own excitement exaggerated the excitement of the voices. "There goes Mantell! !—It's Mantell! ! !—The Great Mantell! ! !!" was what the voices seemed to say. Instead of coming from the lips of three or four, it sounded to him as if the entire crowd was taking up the cry. He opened the stage door and passed in, hanging his head modestly. His heart was swelling to bursting with pride.

He told Charley, his valet, to dress him with extra care tonight—"For it's to be a big night—a night of triumph!" He heard the crowd outside clamoring and cheering. Then a band began to play, "Hail to the Chief" and "The Conquering Hero Comes." He was intoxicated with the delight of it.

He sent to the front of the house for Mart

image

not

available

morning whether Booth's successor had been found or not. There hadn't been a newspaper critic in the house.

Pardon me, gentle reader, while I indulge here in a melancholy prophecy regarding my veracity as a biographer. Three hundred years hence — the longest limit modesty will permit my assigning to the survival of this record — some antiquarian perchance will pick up this volume and read the foregoing anecdote. The cleverness of the coincidence at the base of it will arouse his suspicions. He will diligently search all existing records, political and theatrical, taking no account of any that perchance have been lost, and then will announce triumphantly that the story is a fabrication — that William McKinley and Robert Mantell were never in Kansas City at the same time. He will denounce me, and assert contemptuously that I am wholly unworthy of credence as a biographer. I shall then, alas, be relegated to a place among such disreputable fakers as Moses, Herodotus, Plutarch and Tacitus, for whose most interesting narratives no confirmatory records in carved stone have been found. And the fiendish antiquarian will gloat over his triumph as do the learned delvers in the past of our own day. The thought so saddens me that I shall proceed to a more

image

not

available

in sheer delight. "This is no place yet for vultures and buzzards!"

With "The Corsican Brothers" and "Monbars" still good drawing cards in the romantic field, and "Othello" and "Hamlet" dependable classics, Mantell believed himself strong enough to venture on a tour on his own account, after the fashion of the English actor-managers, and pocket all the profits instead of dividing with a partner. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1891, he severed his connection with Pitou.

Early in the season he strengthened his repertoire with a new play, "The Louisianian," which proved moderately successful. The première, after a brief try-out in smaller towns, was announced for St. Louis, November 6.

On this night, Mantell took the "longest chance" he has ever taken in his entire career, and the thrills back on the stage were much more electric than any he could communicate to the audience.

The opening was scheduled for a Friday night. On the preceding Tuesday, the two leading feminine members of his company, which was presenting repertoire, fell ill simultaneously. The ingénue, Jessie Busley, who since has become famous, was all that was left, and she, though then inexperienced, undertook Desdemona and

image

not

available

himself. He sent his stage manager to the train with a carriage to meet Miss Landor and rush her to the theatre.

He ordered the curtain rung up on a one-act play, "A Lesson in Acting." While the playlet was in progress, Mantell kept one ear turned anxiously to the stage door, but the curtain went down without anything unusual happening back there.

But, just as Mantell had responded to his last curtain call, the door flew open, and in rushed Miss Landor, all dressed and made up for the part. She had converted a stateroom in the train into a dressing room.

"Can we have a few minutes' rehearsal?" she asked Mr. Mantell.

"No, you go anywhere in the scene you choose — I'll find you," answered the star, a great load off his mind.

The curtain went up, and in the entire career of "The Louisianian" there was not given a better performance.

At the conclusion of the second act, the stage manager, whom everybody had forgotten, rushed into the dressing room of the star.

"Oh, Mr. Mantell," he cried in nervous excitement, "the train is in, and Miss Landor wasn't on it!"

"Get out, you bloomin' fool," shouted star, "she's been on and played two acts!"

image

not

available

on the American stage. He had enjoyed that distinction ever since. It had been found he was not an actor of a single rôle. Robert Mantell had not died with Loris Ipanoff. He had won enviable success in "Tangled Lives" and "The Marble Heart," and he had made "Monbars" and "The Corsican Brothers" famous from coast to coast in the United States and Canada — famous with a fame, indeed, that survives after a quarter of a century in the memory of playgoers with a vividness enjoyed by few stage productions. For the play of last year is as surely in the discard as the newspaper of yesterday.

He had a new play, "The Face in the Moonlight," which gave promise of duplicating the successes of his old. He had already given splendid promise in "Othello" and "Hamlet" of a brilliant future as a classic star. He was prospering financially as few male stars, unsupported by female co-stars, prosper in America. The leadership of the stage was in his grasp. Apparently he had only to stretch out his hand and clutch it.

Then it was that a malicious fate stepped in. Robert Mantell was banished from the stage of New York City. Hereafter, he must remain in the "provinces." Without Gotham's approval, the life of the American

image

not

available

He lost ambition. He allowed his company and his productions to sink in standard. The only thing left him was a blind bulldog instinct to act — to do his level best when odds were greatest. This instinct proved his salvation when New York again was opened to him. Then it happened that the rugged "barnstormer" astounded blasé Broadway.

CHAPTER XVI

Exile

THE cause of Robert Mantell's long exile from New York was age-old — only a few days younger than Adam — "the woman." Mantell and Marie Sheldon discovered soon after they were married that they differed in tastes, ideas, ideals and tempers. But they made the best of what both came to regard as a bad bargain. For a long time they lived amicably so far as the outside world knew or cared. Two sons were born, Robert Shand Mantell and Jack Parcher Mantell. Robert has become a successful business man in Detroit, and Jack, also successful in business, has won added distinction in New York as an athlete.

Rumors of domestic difficulties began to drift to the world outside. As Mantell was a popular stage hero, the ears of Dame Gossip were pricked up. The rumors were well grounded, though, quite naturally, exaggerated. There were domestic difficulties — serious difficulties. The climax came in Cincinnati. There was a quarrel. Mantell packed his belongings and left the

hotel. Mrs. Mantell went back to New York. She sued for divorce. Her suit was granted, and with it alimony to the amount of one hundred dollars a week.

It was the alimony that checked Mantell's stage career. At first he paid it. Then, he struck a streak of bad business and got behind. One hundred dollars a week is a lot of money when you stop to think about it. In a few weeks the back alimony piled up formidably. Mantell consulted his lawyers. He was advised not to pay it. He followed the advice. There was a complaint. Mantell was adjudged in contempt of court. A warrant was issued for his arrest, to be served any time he should cross the border into the State of New York. Sunday was excepted. Some amusing and some tragic incidents resulted from Mantell's successful evasions of the sheriff.

Not a great while after the divorce, Mr. Mantell married Charlotte Behrens, a member of his company, whom he made his leading woman. To Mantell and the second Mrs. Mantell was born on December 29, 1895, a daughter, Ethel Mantell, who, at the age of seventeen, followed her father to the stage.

Shortly after the beginning of his alimony troubles, Mantell had a legal quarrel with his new managers, Proctor & Turner,

image

not

available



MISS ETHEL MANTELL

image

not

available

was facing a new season on his own responsibility.

But this summer of 1895 was signalized by an event of first importance to Mr. Mantell's future, though of little apparent consequence at the time — his first meeting with William A. Brady, under whose expert direction he was destined to rise to the pinnacle of fame and affluence.

Brady, who began his money-making career as a promoter of prize fights, his ablest star in those days being James J. Corbett, was now becoming one of the important factors in American theatricals. He was in the transition period. A performance, therefore, of "As You Like It," with "Billy" Muldoon, the most popular wrestler of the day as Charles, could not fail to attract his notice.

It was an idea hatched by George Tyler, who afterwards became a power in the theatrical world as the animating spirit of Leibler & Co. The performance was to be given in the open air at Asbury Park, New Jersey, where Brady had his summer home.

Mantell was chosen by Tyler for Orlando, with a promise of three hundred and fifty dollars for the performance. It looked like a godsend to the actor at this moment. Tyler sent him fifty dollars to bind the bargain.

image

not

available

Five minutes later he was safe from all the sheriffs of the Empire State.

Mantell went on to Asbury Park, where he met Muldoon for the first time. He and the wrestler, both men of heroic physique, and both lovers of physical sport, soon became good friends. They rehearsed the wrestling scene in a large room in their hotel, and worked it down to the liveliest battle, perhaps, in the history of the Shakespearean comedy.

The other guests at the hotel were very curious about the two celebrities, and were continually peering about in hope of seeing them rehearse. On the afternoon before the performance, Muldoon proposed to "put up a job" on them. Mantell agreed.

They went into the room they used for rehearsing and locked the door. Then they began wrestling, making as much noise as possible, banging the furniture about and falling heavily to the floor. The bell boys, waiters and guests flocked to the door and assembled outside. The racket within became terrific. There was a particularly heavy fall, and a moment's silence.

Then the listeners heard Muldoon cry out: "For heaven's sake, Mantell, don't kill me; I give up; you're choking me — you're cutting off my —," and the rest was lost in a painful gurgle, which became

weaker and weaker, and tapered off into a sound like a death rattle. One of the bell boys, in alarm, ran for the proprietor, who quickly came to the door.

"Here, gentlemen," he called out authoritatively, "we can't have any rough house! Open the door!"

Mantell came to the door, unlocked it, and threw it wide.

"Why, we were only rehearsing," he said, but with an admirable counterfeit of a guilty look on his face.

The guests and bell boys and waiters looked past him. They saw Muldoon, apparently greatly crestfallen, rising from the floor.

That evening as they came into the dining room, Mantell strutted proudly in front. Muldoon followed with a hangdog look. Mantell was a demigod to the waiters and a hero to all the guests, who couldn't keep from sending admiring glances all through the meal at the athlete who had quelled the great Muldoon.

That night, Mantell played, for the first time in America, the romantic *Orlando*, as whom he had scored in England with *Marie De Grey*, the gypsy. Later, he added the rôle to his permanent repertoire.

Mr. Brady was in the audience with his wife and his little daughter, Alice, who

since has become a stage beauty of extraordinary talent. Mr. Brady that night saw for the first time his future star. During the course of the evening the two met. It was scarcely more than a handshake at the time, but it paved the way for a partnership profitable to both nearly a decade later.

In September, Mantell pluckily faced the odds which nobody appreciated more keenly than he. "Hamlet" was used, and "Monbars," and "The Corsican Brothers," and "Othello"—occasionally even "The Husband."

"Family reasons," as our grandmothers discreetly put it, kept Charlotte Behrens out of the cast until after the birth of her daughter around the holiday times, increasing the expenses of her husband's company by the salary of a leading woman.

On March 12, Mantell attempted to mend his greatly attenuated fortunes by producing a new play of apparent promise, "The Queen's Garter." But the result before a Cincinnati audience was not encouraging, and audiences elsewhere corroborated Cincinnati's opinion. This entry occurs in the financial notebook at the close of the season: "End of a most disastrous tour."

During the summer, M. W. Hanley, known familiarly as "Genial Mart," entered

image

not

available

CHAPTER XVII

Reaching the Lowest Ebb of the Tide of Fortune.

LOW as Robert Mantell's fortunes had sunk—from the affluence of the darling of Broadway to the poverty of the barnstormer—they were destined to make another plunge diametrically down, like a plummet of lead in the general disaster that now engulfed the theatrical world.

In a time of public calamity, the theatre is the first institution to suffer. The ordinary man or woman doesn't go to see a play when worried. It is only the philosopher who can bring his mind to seek solace in the theatre.

In the autumn of 1897, America scented war with Spain. On the night of February 15, 1898, the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor. On April 21, war began in earnest. The philosophical minority who could find diversion in a theatre didn't make much impression at the box office.

But Mantell and "Mart" Hanley were gamblers. Though odds were decidedly

image

not

available

Windsor and Buffalo. A little funeral party of relatives accompanied it. Mantell was not of their number. He went the long way around, through Ohio. The funeral train had scarcely entered New York at Niagara Falls, when a deputy sheriff boarded it with a warrant for the arrest of Robert Mantell, wanted for contempt of court through failure to pay alimony. That was how much the law respected private grief.

As the war clouds grew blacker and blacker, the box office receipts dwindled to smaller and smaller compass. Mantell, who was working with Hanley on a salary and percentage basis, left in his salary to lighten expenses, drawing only enough to live on. He and Hanley tapped every available source of money to pay salaries and running expenses, plunging deeper and deeper into debt, but struggling on, in the hope that luck would take a turn.

But luck had no such intentions, and on the night of July 2 — the night before the destruction of Cervera's fleet in Santiago harbor — Mantell and Hanley "surrendered" at Rockford, Ill. The night's gross receipts were twenty dollars. The terms were fifty per cent for the company and fifty per cent for the theatre. Hanley made Mantell a present of the ten-dollar bill delivered to him as the company's "share"

image

not

available

away. At forty-four he felt old. The future was dark—black. His career, perhaps, was ended.

In this frame of mind he walked to the hotel where he had always stopped in Philadelphia, and whose proprietor had been a friend of his in his prosperous days. He engaged a room for the night. The proprietor noticed the gloomy look on his face, and asked what was the matter. Nothing, of course. But the hotel man persisted, and wormed the secret of abject poverty from his old-time friend. Without a word, he went to the safe and took out a roll of bills.

"Help yourself," he said, extending the roll to Mantell.

But the actor would take only ten dollars to tide him over until he could look up some Belfast friends in Philadelphia.

Mantell went to his room and was preparing for bed when somebody knocked at his door. He opened it, and there stood an actor friend of his, Robert Downing.

"Saw your name on the register, Bob, and thought I'd come up," Downing greeted cheerfully.

"Well, well," was Mantell's reply, with all the heartiness he could muster, "come in; glad to see you, old man."

Downing had a prosperous, contented look.

image

not

available

of getting in touch with B. F. Keith, who, even at that period, was the king of vaudeville, and by whose efforts vaudeville was gradually raised to its present high standard.

Negotiations were short. Mantell needed money. Keith needed talent. Satisfactory terms were arranged.

Mantell engaged as the leading woman of his little vaudeville company Marie Booth Russell, a young actress who had succeeded Charlotte Behrens as leading woman of his regular company the preceding December, when Miss Behrens was stricken. Miss Russell had immediately made good, first as Gabrielle in "The Secret Warrant," and then in the leading rôles in the other plays of the Mantell repertoire. Miss Russell, who at that time was twenty-three years old, had made her stage débüt three years before in a drama called "The Avalanche." Since then, she had played in various stock and repertoire companies, gaining just such experience as was necessary for success in a company like Mantell's.

Mantell was instructed by the Keith office to go to Boston for an early opening. He was joined there by Miss Russell and two other players he had engaged. They compared purses and found there was seven cents among the four of them. They all

image

not

available

inces," and his fortunes were not to mend materially until after his triumphal re-entry into New York, he was not destined again to become absolutely penniless.

The vaudeville engagement continued for seven or eight weeks in Boston, Philadelphia, Duluth and Chicago, and might have run on indefinitely had Mr. Keith had his way. But Mr. Mantell, in spite of a bank account already swelling to gratifying proportions, could not shake off the feeling that the "varieties" was beneath his dignity, and that his destiny lay on the legitimate stage.

Meanwhile, too, Spain had been given a thorough drubbing. A preliminary treaty of peace had been signed the middle of August, and the country was jubilant over the results of a successful war. The spirit abroad in the land promised prosperity to the theatres.

With his pockets full of money and his hopes bubbling with the froth that comes from material comfort, Mantell, again under the direction of Hanley, opened a new season early in September. Business brightened a bit. "Monbars" and "The Corsican Brothers" were again the features of the repertoire, and the receipts ran in the neighborhood of fifteen hundred dollars a week. It was still starvation business, but



image

not

available



MANTELL AND HIS FAMOUS DOG, "RUBBER"



image

not

available

almost human, and it wasn't long before he learned a trick by which he never failed to outwit the Pullman people. He knew from experience in the early days that if he failed he would have to ride in the lonesome baggage cars.

Here is how it was done. Mantell would engage the attention of the porter with his grips and bundles. Wieda, the little Jap valet, would take care of the conductor with questions as to the time of leaving and the route. Then, when everybody's notice was distracted, Mantell would say to Rubber, "Beat it!" Up the steps the dog would spring, quick as a flash, and make for the stateroom which he knew his master would occupy. There he would crawl under a seat out of the way until the others arrived and all danger of detection was passed. The porter's eyes seldom failed to bulge when he found Rubber in taking down the beds, but a fifty-cent piece always closed his mouth.

Rubber was born in Woodstock, Ontario, and was presented to Mantell when he was two months old. From that time until two or three years before the end, he was seldom out of sight of the actor, who grew to love him almost as a child.

As Rubber grew old, his sight and hearing began to fail, and Mantell left him at home

image

not

available

he and Rubber went to Atlantic City and later to Asbury Park to rest during the remaining period of the hot weeks.

The next season, which extended through the waning days of the old century and the dawning of the new, witnessed a material improvement in the fortunes of Mantell. Still under the management of Hanley, he opened at Trenton, New Jersey, in a new play, "The Dagger and the Cross," dramatized from Joseph Hatton's novel by the Canadian Tremayne, who had written for Mantell "The Secret Warrant."

Business improved decidedly. In Pittsburgh, it reached the astonishing total of \$4465. Mantell and Hanley, accustomed to statements of from \$1500 to \$1800, were dazed. In Cincinnati the receipts soared to \$4600. Again their hearts fluttered dangerously. Mantell, today, with his expensive company, would look at such figures gloomily. But then they had the appearance of the resources of the First National Bank of Bonanza.

The season continued fairly prosperous, and from the small, but constant, profits, Mantell and Hanley wiped out several of their most pressing debts.

More important still, Mantell had saved enough from his salary, which he had drawn in full this season for the first time in three

image

not

available

CHAPTER XVIII

In Which is Related how a Romantic Star was Finally Transformed into a Classicist, and how the Way was Paved for his Return from Exile.

THE transformation of Robert Mantell from a romantic to a classic star was slow and gradual, though the impression on the memory of the average theatregoer is that it was made with something of the rapidity of the transition from Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. This impression is due, in the first place, to the almost complete change in his style of acting, but, secondly, and more important, to the bizarre fortunes of his career.

In 1883, Mantell as Loris Ipanoff flashed upon New York as the most brilliant romantic actor of his time. For ten years he shone as a star of the first magnitude, and then suddenly he disappeared from the theatrical heavens of the metropolis. For ten years more, then, he roamed around in the darkness of the "provinces," and New York forgot him. Then, as suddenly and unexpectedly as in 1883, he burst upon Broadway again. But this time it was as a

image

not

available



ROBERT BRUCE MANTELL

image

not

available

surely brightened. At the close of the century, it would have taken an astronomical photometer to detect the difference in brilliancy. "Monbars," "The Corsican Brothers," "Hamlet," "Othello"—they were practically equal in artistry and in drawing power.

The equilibrium was not greatly disturbed the first season of the new century by two new additions to the repertoire, one classic and the other romantic—"Romeo and Juliet," by William Shakespeare, and "The Free Lance," by W. A. Tremayne, the third play written for Mantell by the Canadian. Neither venture was more than moderately successful. But "Romeo and Juliet," this time, was retained in the permanent repertoire, and not rejected as it had been at the time Mantell made his first unfortunate revival of the romantic tragedy in America.

The balance reached between the classic and romantic parts of the repertoire at the beginning of the century was not long maintained. Slowly but surely the classic end of the beam began to force up the romantic end. Mantell never himself realized how much the equilibrium had been disturbed until the autumn of 1910, when he produced "The O'Flynn," which, by all the old rules, should have been a

romantic success, but which proved a dismal failure financially.

Mantell and Hanley were not blind to the state of the balance at the dawn of the century, and they took measures accordingly. After "The Free Lance," they sought no more new plays, but during the summer vacation of 1901, Mantell and his wife retired to the quiet little village of Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, to study "Richelieu" and "Richard III." It was their first visit to Atlantic Highlands. They were so charmed with the spot, both for a summer home and as a quiet place for preparation for the ensuing season, that they returned there summer after summer, and finally bought the Leonard homestead, which has since become famous as "Bracewood," the beautiful Mantell estate.

On September 2, 1901, Robert Mantell began his first tour as an avowed classic star. "Hamlet" was advertised as the feature of the tour, and "Richelieu" and "Richard III" were announced for production a little later. "Othello," too, was brought into prominence. "Monbars" and "The Corsican Brothers" were not dropped, however, from the repertoire. Mantell and Hanley did not feel quite sure enough of themselves to burn the bridges behind them.

The season was less than a week old when

President McKinley was assassinated at Buffalo. During the period of public mourning that followed, the theatres fared badly everywhere.

On the night of September 24, at Zanesville, Ohio, Mantell appeared for the first time in his career in the title rôle of "Richelieu." It was as DeMauprat in this drama of Bulwer's, it will be remembered, that he in his amateur days played for the first time in a real theatre.

The launching of "Richelieu" was successful, and Mantell turned his attention immediately to putting the finishing touches to "Richard III." The first performance was given at South Bend, Indiana, October 12. The receipts were only \$238. But the following Monday night in Chicago, "Richard" drew \$787, and on the strength of that showing was duly elected to the permanent repertoire. A few weeks later, it played to \$911.30 in Toronto, which was the biggest house Mantell had enjoyed since the prosperous days before the exile.

It was fortunate for Mantell that he retained "Richard III." For "Richard," after undergoing three years of polish, was to re-establish the star in New York.

During this first season as an avowed classic star, the way was paved for the return to Gotham. The one hundred dollars

image

not

available

ember 18, 1901, when the lawyers came to an agreement, and December 5, 1904, when Mantell's performance of "Richard III" at the Princess Theatre demonstrated that the line of great tragedians on the American stage had not ended with Edwin Booth.

During these three years, Mantell even played two engagements in New York without anybody being aware of his presence. The first opened November 30, 1903, and continued for three weeks. Mantell occupied the very theatre that had been the scene of his triumph in "Fedora." But the theatrical center had moved far out Broadway, and Fourteenth Street was all but forgotten. The receipts of the engagement by weeks were \$2400, \$1900 and \$1600. Verily, Robert Mantell was known no longer in New York. Verily, too, as the rapid decline in business week by week showed, he couldn't "come back." During this engagement, he played first "The Corsican Brothers" and next "The Light of Other Days," a new play with which he had opened that season.

The second New York appearance was made a few weeks later in the same season, January 8, 1904. The theatre was the Metropolis in the Bronx. It was a playhouse that the Park Row critics did not succeed in finding. But business improved.

image

not

available

And further to show you how penitent I am, I am going to unfold here a tale of romance that cannot fail to re-establish me in your good graces. It belongs in these latter days of Hanley's management, and has as its heroine a mysterious lady who always wore a bouquet of blood-red roses.

This young woman, although Mantell, who was living happily with Marie Booth Russell, had never met her, followed the matinée idol from city to city for several days, buying a seat always in a box nearest the stage to watch his performances. The experience is not unparalleled in the lives of most handsome young men who have arrived at distinction on the stage, for femininity, at times, is as foolish as — as — well, say, as masculinity.

No further notice than good-natured banter of the star, would have been taken of the lady of the blood-red roses by Hanley and the rest of the company, including Mantell, had it not been that her sudden disappearance from a hotel in Bridgeport, Connecticut, led the hotel keeper and the police to discover that she had left behind a heavy pistol with all the chambers loaded.

Nothing more was seen of her until the company arrived in Hartford. Then, on the opening night of the engagement there she was discovered by Hanley, sitting in a box,

but with the draperies drawn in front of her.

Hanley went back stage and told Mantell and the others about it. There was no delicate way they could see of ejecting the woman, since she was causing no disturbance, but every one was afraid she might fire suddenly at the actor during the course of the performance.

Then stepped forth a heroine in the person of Miss Corona Ricardo, a fiery little Italian actress, who was playing juvenile leads, while Marie Booth Russell was playing the heavier parts. Miss Ricardo produced a bright and dangerous-looking little dagger, such as women of the Latin races not infrequently carry, and volunteered to protect the star by placing herself between him and the lady with the blood-red roses. Her services were accepted, and the play proceeded. Before the performance was over, the mysterious woman disappeared from the box, and neither Mantell nor any of the company ever saw her again. Miss Ricardo was inclined to believe the stranger saw the glitter of her dagger, and thought better of any possible plans of assassination, and the little actress swore she would have used her weapon had there been a suspicious move on the part of the red bouquet.



The season which opened in the fall of 1902 was the last under the management of "Mart" Hanley, who had struggled pluckily against odds in the enthusiastic hope of making Mantell ultimately a highly profitable star. But he had failed. First, because of Mantell's exile from New York. Second, because Mantell was too good an actor ever to be more than moderately popular in the second-rate theatres, where he was sandwiched in between "*The King of the Opium Ring*" and "*The Hired Girl's Millions*."

It was largely Mantell's desire to get away from the companionship of the lurid melodramas that led to the severance of his connection with Hanley. In the autumn of 1903, he opened under the nominal management of Max Zoellner, who negotiated first-class bookings for him with the Klaw & Erlanger syndicate. "*The Light of Other Days*," his new play, in which he was to appear in New York, was launched September 3. It reached the climax of its financial popularity at the Olympic Theatre, St. Louis, when the receipts attained the total, which looked phenomenal to Mantell, of fifty-four hundred dollars on the week.

But, after St. Louis, Mantell was sent into wretched territory in the South, and it was to escape starvation that he despatched

image

not

available

rector. He hung his own scenery, set his stage and gave the signal for the ringing up and ringing down of the curtain. From nine o'clock in the morning until midnight he did not leave the theatre.

It happened that he had a new stage crew throughout. He had sent to New York for the production of "Richard III," which he had not removed from the storehouse at the beginning of the season, and it reached Pottsville on the morning of his own arrival there. Nobody but himself was familiar with it. After it had been hauled into the theatre, he had to see to the unpacking and hanging of the production, to the fitting of the wardrobe on the various actors and actresses of the company, to the fitting and trimming of the wigs, to the direction of the orchestra in the rehearsal of the music, to the touching up of the scenery where it had been worn and scratched, and to the thousand and one other details, which Harry Keefer, then the new stage manager, since that day has taken off his shoulders. Into the two hours between six and eight o'clock in the evening was crowded an appalling amount of work.

But the performance went off smoothly enough, and "Richard III" demonstrated its fitness to succeed "The Light of Other Days." Mantell retained "Richelieu,"

image

not

available

time" allotted him was notoriously the worst in the year — the three weeks before Christmas. And, to cap a climax that didn't need a cap, he was assigned the Princess Theatre, a little upstairs house with a stage too small to accommodate even his own miserable productions.

But Mantell had gambled before with fate, and he decided to make the best of a wretched situation. With the decision came an iron determination to succeed. Wrath lashed him on, just as it did the opening night of "Fedora" when the audience sat frozen.

image

not

available

crowded, and Mantell was assigned to a couch in the library.

Earlier in the evening he had been discussing his proposed venture with friends at the club.

"Have you gone crazy, Bob?" one had asked. "'Richard' for an opening! Whoever heard of such a thing!"

"Are you in your second childhood, Mantell?" had observed another.

"Do you think New York wants 'Richard' — especially at Christmas time?" a third had asked. "Why don't you do 'Monbars' or 'The Corsican Brothers,' or something like that? I tell you, Shakespeare's a dead one in this town."

"If you've got to give us Shakespeare," advised a fourth, "why don't you do something that's got a chance? 'Hamlet' or 'The Merchant' or something? You'll never get a nickel with 'Richard.' You can't draw a critic to the Princess even for the luxury of roasting you."

These opinions were still ringing in Mantell's head when he retired to the library for the night. He wasn't so sure but that the Job's comforters knew what they were talking about. He threw himself on his couch, and gazed vacantly, with a dull, mental pain, at the walls. Gradually there grew into his consciousness the pictures of

image

not

available

"You may believe it or not, Bob, but in the theatre the night of 'Richard' there was a whole crowd of souls of dead tragedians, and every one of them was boasting for you!"

Whether there were any ghosts of the dead at the Princess that night is left, without prejudice, to the credulity of the reader. Certain it is that there were ghosts of flesh and blood, as Carlyle insists on styling animated humanity, marveling, as he does, that we should look for miracles in the graveyards when so many miracles are elbowing us daily in the crowded streets. These "ghosts" were not especially numerous, but the little audience was an attentive one, and — very important for Mantell — there were present a few newspaper writers, who, in the dull season before the holidays, had no new productions to occupy their minds. They had strolled into the Princess because there was no place else to go.

Mantell strained every nerve to project across the footlights everything that was in him. But never in stage history in a moment so critical has a great actor been so aggravatingly handicapped.

It had come about in this way. The stage crew at the Princess that afternoon had demanded a scenic rehearsal. It would have meant a little money for them, but

Mantell had no money to spend for anything not absolutely essential. He had with him his own crew, who, on the one-night stands in Pennsylvania, after his personal instructions at Pottsville, had become proficient in handling "Richard III," without any help whatsoever from the badly trained men so often found on village stages.

Mantell's refusal to order a scenic rehearsal rankled in the breasts of the Princess house crew. They concocted a scheme of revenge that would "break up the show."

When Mantell walked out into the first narrow scene where the back drop was only three or four feet from the footlights, and where he necessarily stood with his back almost touching the curtain, they proceeded to put their plan into execution.

One of the stage hands in crossing behind the drop lunged heavily against the actor through the canvas, almost knocking him down. With a sneer, he begged the pardon of Harry Keefer, Mantell's stage manager, who had witnessed the "accident." He had hardly done so, when another tripped over a stage brace, and saved himself from falling only by throwing out his arms and striking Mantell a heavy blow through the drop.

So admirably impassive did Mantell seem

to the insolence, that even the most experienced playgoer in the audience did not notice that there was anything seriously wrong. They may have seen the drop move, but that occasionally happens by accident when a new setting is being erected behind.

Mantell finished his lines and went off for a few moments, inwardly boiling, but outwardly calm. He quietly warned the crew that somebody would get badly hurt if they didn't stop their cowardly attempts to spoil his chances of making good with the audience. As he re-entered the scene, he heard the men laugh derisively.

The actor walked on all alert for the next move of the enemy, but, so far as the audience could notice, absorbed in his impersonation of Richard. There was a clatter of stage braces falling to the floor. Then Mantell noticed a hand feeling along the drop to locate him. He turned half round, with one side toward the drop and the other toward the audience, and drew his dagger, making the action fit into his lines with the resourcefulness of the long training that playing in repertoire gives. He held the dagger so that his body concealed it from the audience, and waited.

He saw the form of the man back scenes print itself against the drop, preparing, as

image

not

available

dressing room and get that glove I use in the last act."

The excited valet was away, and back in a moment.

"Now take a good look at this gauntlet," said Mantell to the crew. "It is studded with iron. I'm a strong man, and with a blow of this glove I can fell an ox. I'm going to wear this through the rest of the play. If there's the least disturbance back here when I'm on the stage, I'll walk off instantly, and I'll brain the man that's making it."

How the ghost of Heffernan must have laughed if he was among the dead tragedians looking on!

Never in his career did Mantell act on a quieter stage than after that little speech. Nor ever did he play with more fire. The wrath engendered by his fight with the crew was converted into dramatic fury. He literally electrified his little audience. The dramatic critics who had strolled in "to kill an evening" felt the blood leap through their veins with a bound whose thrill they had almost forgotten in the long absence of great tragic acting from the New York stage. They went back to their desks and wrote fervently of what they had seen and heard. Even Alan Dale, most caustic of reviewers, forgot to let loose the vials of his vitriolic

image

not

available

the New York managerial field. Mantell's contract with Zoellner would expire February 4, 1905. He signed a new contract with Brady to go into effect February 6.

From the moment of his triumphal re-entry into New York on that night of December 5, 1904, Robert Mantell's fortunes have steadily improved, and his fame as America's leading classic actor has become firmly established. The long struggle for recognition as an artist is over. With this recognition have come the material comforts that grateful theatregoers shower upon their favorites through the contribution of their mites at the box office.

CHAPTER XX.

In Which, as King Lear, Robert Mantell Takes a Place in the Stage History of All Time.

IMEDIATELY after his contract with Mantell went into effect, Brady started with his characteristic zeal to develop his new star. He arranged a short "stock" season at the Alvin Theatre, Pittsburgh. There he and Mantell began vigorously to overhaul the company and thus improve the support of the star that had been so sadly lacking in New York. Marie Booth Russell, leading woman, and Harry Keefer, stage manager, were retained.

The first week, Mantell played "Richard III" twice a day, and he and Brady rehearsed the company every day besides. The second week, the bill was "Richelieu," also twice a day, and with the daily rehearsals. The third week it was "Othello," with the same vigorous proceedings, and the fourth week "Hamlet." The fifth week, "The Corsican Brothers" was tried. The receipts fell to one-half. Mantell was wanted as a classic star — his romantic days were over.

On March 27, Mantell started on tour at the head of the company he and Brady had reorganized. But the season was too near an end to attempt anything out of the ordinary. An invasion of Chicago, however, was tried, with financial disappointment. The Iroquois Theatre had just been rebuilt after the fire so dreadful in the theatrical annals of America, and to Mantell was assigned the task of rededicating it. He was the first star of consequence to go into the reconstructed playhouse. Chicago stayed away.

Mantell and Brady, however, seized the opportunity of the engagement in Chicago to go through with some more vigorous rehearsals. One day they were overhauling "*Richard III.*" Mantell became thoroughly tired out. Brady told him to go to his hotel and "take a nap" before the night performance. He then proceeded to rehearse the company alone.

In the wings stood two "supers."

"Who is that guy?" asked one of them, in a low voice, with a nod of his head in Brady's direction.

"Hush! That's the author," said the other.

At the close of the brief spring tour, Mantell retired to Atlantic Highlands, where he spent the busiest summer of his career

in the hard study of new rôles. Brady had put new life into him. The future looked bright again.

On the night of October 23, 1905, Mantell opened at the Garden Theatre, New York, an engagement that, for artistic achievement, has never been duplicated in the history of the American stage. The engagement started with "Richard III," which Mantell now regarded as his mascot, and he depended on Richard to overcome a "hoodoo" that was reputed to hang over the Garden. The wittily malevolent hunchback — partly, perhaps, because of the hump, if you are superstitious in that direction — was partially successful so far as finances were concerned, for he made possible an eight weeks' stay. When it came to artistic recognition, he proved an amulet of superlative power.

The first of the novelties of this red-letter engagement at the Garden was "Macbeth," presented the night of November 13. It was the first time Mantell had played the Thane since the memorable night in Hull twenty-three years before, when he had bade good-bye to the gypsy stage queen, Marie De Grey. "Macbeth" was praised by the critics, who were watching with interest the development of the new classic star. It was easily the best Macbeth

in elocution since Booth's, and it surpassed Booth's from the physical standpoint.

But the success of Cawdor was swallowed up two weeks later by an amazing triumph in "King Lear"—a triumph that is renewed every time Mantell plays the mad old monarch, the one creation of Shakespeare which puts the Elizabethan dramatist, in spite of Tolstoi's opinion, on a par of sublimity with the tragedians of the golden age of Greece.

Mantell's King Lear, taken all in all, is his masterwork. There is a tremendous force of genius in it that never fails to stun the onlooker. However blasé the theatre-goer may be—however he may despise or affect to despise the elocutionary art of Shakespeare in this age of stage realism, he cannot sit in the theatre when Mantell is playing Lear without being caught in the cyclonic swirl of tragic emotion.

It was my good fortune to see an extraordinary performance of this masterpiece of world tragedy, which I remember as the most vividly magnetic experience in a somewhat extended career as a professional witnesser of plays. It was on the night of January 27, 1913, the opening night of Mantell's first engagement in Boston in seven years.

Mantell had shunned the center of New

England culture. He had been treated unmercifully on his last previous visit. The critics had vied with each other then in the art of vivisection. They had found every imaginable fault with his company and his productions, and had concluded that "besides" Mantell himself was a "ham-actor" and "barnstormer." The few playgoers who attended the performances throughout the fortnight of fusillade scarcely dared raise a dissenting voice against the consensus of opinion of the learned gentlemen of the press, and the engagement was a miserable failure, artistically and financially.

Mantell didn't forget the experience. Whenever he saw Boston on his route sheet he felt even his tough courage ooze. So much of it would seep away as the time approached to fill the date that he would end up by seeking and finding an excuse for cancelling the engagement. It was the only city in America he feared. All the others he had conquered.

But, in 1913, he screwed his courage to the sticking point. I was his press agent at the time. In Buffalo, a few weeks before the Boston engagement, he confessed to me his fears, and we laid plans for a campaign of publicity to be wholly legitimate and dignified, so as to give the critics no opening for charges of sensationalism.

Mantell began his engagement with "King Lear." I saw him a few minutes before the curtain went up, and he had the bull-dog look he always wears when he means to conquer. When he walked on the stage he flashed into his audience that indescribable broadside of magnetism always radiated by a player of genius, but in this instance a dozen times stronger than I had ever felt it before. The audience was caught instantly.

"I felt a return flash," Mr. Mantell afterwards told me, "and I realized I had them."

He not only caught them, but he kept them. The audience appeared fascinated. Their eyes followed his every movement, and their ears drank in every note of his voice.

When the curtain closed on the curse scene, the audience appeared stunned. Every swish of the velvet could be heard. Then, there burst forth a thunder-clap of applause, which lengthened into a long roar. Somebody down front leaped to his feet and yelled, "Bravo!" Voices all over the house caught up the cry. Spectators everywhere sprang to their feet. Handkerchiefs were waved in the air. Mantell, or rather King Lear — for the tragedian did not step out of character — appeared time

image

not

available



LEAR AND THE DEAD CORDELIA
Mr. Mantell and Miss Hamper

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

AND NEW YORK AND
THEIR CONNECTIONS
R L

Had not Charles Lamb, keen critic of literature and of the stage, pronounced the tragedy unactable? Had not the experience of three centuries pretty nearly borne out this estimate?

Richard Burbage, that giant of the Elizabethan stage who created all the tragic heroes of his fellow-actor, Will Shakespeare, played the part — perhaps well — maybe ill. We have nothing about him except a glowing epitaph, and epitaphs are not to be trusted. David Garrick, the John the Baptist of stage naturalism, shone luminously in the rôle. Spranger Barry was his rival. Of Barry the makers of epigram said after they saw him as Lear: "He was every inch a king." After they saw Garrick they said, "He was every inch King Lear." Edwin Forrest on this side the Atlantic is reputed a magnificent Lear. He, in his day, was the American Garrick of the rôle; Edwin Booth was the Barry. In all other creations where they clashed, Booth was the Garrick and Forrest the Barry.

Burbage, Garrick, Forrest — where in the three centuries was there to be found another tremendously great Lear, even if Burbage can be counted? All of the older tragedians had tried the part, and all had encountered insurmountable obstacles, except Garrick and Forrest and perhaps

image

not

available

although his financial success in the part has been tempting. Others have tried Othello and Macbeth and Shylock and Richelieu, but they have left Lear alone. Mantell must be considered the greatest Lear of his time — the greatest potentially, as well as the only one actually revealed. For in these days of keen competition, another great Lear would scarcely be content to lie dormant.

How does Mantell compare with Forrest and Garrick and Burbage? There is no way of determining absolutely. When the actor dies, his art, unfortunately, vanishes from the world. All that is left is the memory of it, and this memory grows more and more hazy as the years glide away. Then, when they who saw him are dead, all that remains is a written record of a few impressions, incomplete, inadequate, perhaps inaccurate. We are positive of the superb genius of Phidias, for we read it in his marbles almost as readily as did his contemporaries, who had only the advantage over us of appreciating a certain symbolism now lost. The soul of Raphael lives in his marvelous colors. The baton of the orchestra leader can call forth the ghost of Beethoven from his tomb.

But what do we know of Garrick? Walpole and Gray tell us something of his

image

not

available

Lear ought to be, as seen with the eyes of youth. It may be that Mantell interprets to him now the philosophy that maturity had discovered in the old man of sorrows. Or it is possible Mr. Winter, in his younger days, was fascinated by the terrible force of Forrest that would not have appealed to him in maturity. Maybe fancy wove, after long years, one of her golden haloes around a memory that was becoming ever more and more dreamy.

But even if we could decide between Mantell and Forrest, what power would enable us to determine the precedence in the case of Forrest and Garrick or Garrick and Burbage? In view of the difficulty, it is perhaps best to expand the trio of great Lears into a quartet — Burbage, Garrick, Forrest, Mantell.

image

not

available

melancholy regret that "the cunning had left him."

The only literal truth in which Mantell remembers detecting him was a statement that he had once been a sailor. The confirmation came when a small fire started one night in the rigging loft. Bird, with the experienced agility that comes only to a sailor, quickly clambered up the scenery, cut the ropes and let fall the burning drapery.

On one occasion, however, Bird's former seamanship led him into an "error" that was characteristic. In the company was an actor named Sanderson who scorned to lie by word of mouth, but who converted the piano into an instrument of prevarication. Sanderson would bang away at the keys with all the seriousness and confidence of a Paderewski. It was not unusual for him to persuade his hearers with slight musical education that he was a master pianist.

One night, Bird and Sanderson were thrown together with Mantell and several other professionals in the parlor of "Policy Bill" Smith, of Cincinnati, who was fond of entertaining stage people. Sanderson drifted inevitably to the piano. He struck a rumbling, thundering chord, and announced he would sing "The Wreck of the

Hesperus" to a musical setting of his own.

It was the schooner Hesperus,
That sailed the wintry sea;

Bird's attention was riveted immediately.
Here was a tale of his beloved ocean.

And the skipper had taken his little daughter,
To bear him company.

Sanderson's voice grew plaintive and tender. He chorded away at the piano with an air of supreme mastery.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds,
That ope in the month of May.

Bird's eyes grew moist and misty. Sanderson, glancing around at all his hearers, as was his custom when playing, to note the effect, saw he had charmed Bird. He went on to tell of the warning of the "old sailor, had sailed the Spanish main," and of the skipper's scornful laugh, throwing a realistic ripple into his "musical setting" to indicate the sinister mirth. Another glance at Bird. He was eagerly eating the words and drinking in the music.

Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the northeast,

Sanderson was in his element now. His voice became a deep bass, and he struck

every low rumbling tone of which the piano was capable. He fairly squirmed in his ecstasy.

The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.

Again a glance at Bird. Sanderson was playing to nobody else now. Here was an "audience" worth while. This ex-sailor could appreciate more keenly than an entire assembly of landsmen. Had he not himself been sometime in a storm at sea? Was not there flitting through his mind, realistically conjured up by the magic of Sanderson's music, a feverish throng of actual memories of the deep?

Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;

The very roof of the house shook to the thunder of the piano.

She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,
Then leaped her cable's length.

Bird's heart leaped to the music. Sanderson saw it in his face. The rest of the company noticed it now, and they, too, began watching Bird. Sanderson's performance was amusing enough, but the fun was now doubled in watching the response of his victim, who followed him as a sparrow does a snake.

Sanderson went on through the recital

of the terrors of that night of storm and darkness and death. Old Timotheus at the feast of Alexander found no more fascinated auditor in the conqueror of the world than did this actor at the piano in the ex-sailor. Then:

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast.

How wonderfully tender the tone! Great tears stood in Bird's eyes.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,
On the billows fall and rise.

Bird broke down completely, and sobbed like a child. It was a mighty triumph for Sanderson. If his setting for "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*" could so stir a human heart, was it not a masterpiece? Was not his fame as a composer assured?

Into the last stanza now he threw what seemed to him incredible awe and reverence:

Such was the wreck of the *Hesperus*,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!

Bird's sobs were gentler now under the soothing influence, but his frame was still shaking convulsively. Sanderson got

up from the piano, and walked over to the victim of his musical magic.

"There! There!" he said, slapping him kindly on the back. "Cheer up, old man, the mood will pass!"

"It isn't the mood," answered Bird, "but a terrible memory. I was in that wreck, and you recalled vividly to me all the horrible details. It was frightful. Oh! Oh! That poor girl! When she was cast up on the beach, I saw the sea gulls picking out her eyes. Oh, it was horrible! Oh! Oh!"

This man Sanderson, besides being so excellent a musician, deserves a place in the hall of fame as the champion "pass grafter" of the world. He employed every conceivable argument and excuse for getting free tickets for his friends.

Illness at last forced him to leave Mantell's company. He was confined to a hospital in New York when the tragedian was filling an engagement there. Every day he sent to his former employer and friend a request for passes for somebody — a comrade had kindly dropped in to see him, a doctor had relieved a tormenting pain, a nurse had gone out of the routine of her duties to do him a special favor. All such requests were honored.

Finally, one day, poor Sanderson sent Mantell a letter that he was near death's

door. He would never get up again. He had forgiven all his enemies, and had thought gratefully again of all the kindnesses of his friends. At his request an undertaker had been to see him. He was a splendid fellow and sympathetic. Wouldn't Mr. Mantell, for old time's sake, send him a couple of seats for the undertaker?

Such a request could not be refused. The passes were the last Sanderson ever asked for. Mantell, by chance, met the undertaker afterward — after the poor actor had been laid to rest. The undertaker thanked the tragedian for the passes, and assured him he had taken special pains with all that was left of poor old Sanderson.

But Bird is too precious to lose in the grave with Sanderson.

Once the Mantell Company was riding in their special car across the boundless plains of the far West. Mr. and Mrs. Mantell were sitting toward the rear of the car. Bird was a few seats ahead. The setting sun shone on the manager's face, giving it a sort of copper tinge. An idea struck the tragedian.

"I'll bet a dollar," he said suddenly to Marie Booth Russell, "that I can make George say he is part Indian."

Mrs. Mantell took the bet, more for the

sake of the sport than from any idea of winning.

Mr. Mantell walked up the aisle of the car to where Bird was sitting.

"Pardon me, George," he said, "for putting a delicate question, but when Mrs. Mantell and I sat back there watching the setting sun play on your face, I noted something in the lines of your cheek and nose — something noble — that suggested — pardon me — suggested you might have Indian blood in you. If it isn't indiscreet, may I ask if my impression was right?"

"Governor," answered Bird, solemnly, "you are the first person in the company who has noticed that. Yes," effusively, "I have. I am related to Chief Falling Water, who is a direct descendant of Pocahontas."

Bird was given one of the four twenty-five-cent cigars Mantell bought with the dollar Marie Booth Russell paid him.

One night Bird, whose proper place was in the front of the house at the door or the box-office, happened to be back on the stage in the wings during the first act of "Hamlet." The Prince had just encountered his father's ghost alone, and the spirit had vanished at the first sniff of dawn.

"Hello!" shouted Hamlet, "ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come!"



image

not

available

actor — one of our coming men on the stage.'

"Of course, I was all puffed up at the idea of lunching with the talked-about people and all that sort of thing, and I accepted in a hurry. It was a great luncheon — private dining room at the club, you know, wine with every course and all the trimmings. We talked about art and the future of the stage, and when we were through Godwin called for the check. He looked at it.

"'Oh, only nine pounds ten and six. Very reasonable indeed — very reasonable.'

"Then he began feeling in his pockets — inside, outside, everywhere.

"'Bless my soul — where's my purse? Most extraordinary — why — I don't think I've got a bit of money about me. I say, Tree, old man, have you got a tener with you?'

"Tree waked up and began digging.

"'A tener? Why, certainly, old chap, of course.'

"He pulled out a lonely looking shilling.

"'What's this? A shilling? My word — where is that ten-pound Bank of England note — I certainly remember putting one in here.'

"There they were, both fingering through their pockets, and I sought to relieve their embarrassment.

"If you will allow me, gentlemen," I suggested, "I shall be only too happy to settle."

"Tut, tut," said Godwin, "not at all, my boy — couldn't hear of it — why, you're our guest — couldn't think of such a thing."

"They kept on searching until it was plain both were broke except for the shilling, and finally I paid the check — something like fifty dollars it amounted to. Then Godwin arose and extended to me his hand.

"I have met gentlemen," he said feelingly, "but you are a nobleman. You shall have this in the morning, old chap. Where are you stopping, Cecil or Carleton?"

"I was stopping at very modest lodgings in Pimlico, but I gave him the address — and that was the last I heard of the tener."

"Twenty years afterward I was again in London. Beerbohm Tree had come up the ladder, and was playing 'Rip Van Winkle' at His Majesty's. I dropped in to see the performance, and sent my card around. An usher came back with the message Mr. Tree would like to see me.

"I went to his dressing room. We confronted each other, and after a moment without exchanging so much as a greeting, both burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at, Mantell?" Tree chuckled.

“ ‘What are you, Mr. Tree?’ I countered.

“ ‘By gad,’ he answered, ‘I guess I owe you a dinner.’

“ ‘I guess so, too,’ I replied. ‘It’s been twenty years, but I see you’re not asleep like our old friend Rip.’

“ After the show we went to the Carleton, and Tree ordered a dinner that settled all scores.”

The story of Mantell’s first meeting with Edwin Booth is also well worth relating. Mrs. Kate Byron, sister of Ada Rehan, and herself a former stage celebrity, told it to me at her summer home in Long Branch.

It was in Miss Fisher’s boarding house in Boston — not the famous Fultah Fisher of Kipling — but a Fisher no less renowned among theatrical people than Fultah among seafaring men. Miss Fisher’s boarding house was of a type that is now only a vague, pleasant memory with men and women of the stage, who spent so many happy, homelike hours in such establishments. The true theatrical boarding house has gone, alas, the way of the green room.

Mrs. Byron and Mr. Booth were standing by a parlor window talking, when in danced Mantell, a stage youngster. He had a bit of tobacco in his cheek, and a merry countenance that would eloquently interpret the Dromios.

Mrs. Byron and Mantell were good friends.

"Mr. Booth," said the actress, "meet Mr. Mantell."

"Delighted," said Mantell, breezily, extending his hand before the other could get in a word. "What did you say the name was?"

"Booth — Edwin Booth," answered Mrs. Byron, eyeing Mantell keenly.

"Oh, ah, oh my!" exclaimed Mantell with a gulp that carried with it the tobacco down his throat.

He fled from the room, and it was a long time before he could ever muster up courage again to meet the distinguished tragedian.

CHAPTER XXII.

In Which the Belated Shower of Gold Begins to Trickle Gently Down from Gotham's Skies.

THE recognition of Robert Mantell as the leader of the American stage on the night of his first performance of "King Lear" had no immediate effect financially at the Garden Theatre. But such an effect became apparent the moment he left New York for a tour. He saw then a conclusive demonstration of the value of a New York endorsement. During the days of his exile from the metropolis he had toured the country continuously, and had made his name known everywhere, but there was little magic in it of the magnetic sort that attracts gold to the box office.

But now that New York had spoken, and spoken enthusiastically, there was a tremendous change. Figures in this case speak as through a megaphone. Mantell went to Chicago for a two weeks' stay. The first week he played to \$8755 and the second to \$9600. At his last previous engagement — not counting the one at the old Iroquois

where fate was against everybody — his receipts had amounted to only \$2100 on the week, and this business had been gratifying to him in comparison with that of some former visits.

The profits on the season passed \$15,000, in addition to his salary, a thing unheard of before, even in his prosperous days preceding the exile.

During this summer of 1906, Mantell rested at Atlantic Highlands in the beautiful Leonard Homestead. It was this property that he bought the following summer and rechristened "Brucewood," from his middle name and in honor of the national hero of Scotland. "Brucewood" has become famous among the summer homes along the Jersey coast, and is one of the most attractive of them all. A big, picturesque house sits in the middle of extensive grounds, parked after the manner of the country estates of England and Scotland, and surrounded by a unique wooden rail fence of Mantell's own designing.

The season of 1906-7 was one of triumphs for the actor who so long had crawled in the dust of poverty, but who now had been raised to the heavens of prosperity. Early in the season in Montreal, he played Iago for the first time in America, and succeeded so well in the part, to which he gave a



"BRUCEWOOD," THE MANTELL ESTATE

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

AS PUBLISHED IN
THE NEW YORK
DAILY NEWS

peculiar twist and zest that had been lacking in his predecessors, that, for a time, he alternated it with Othello.

In Buffalo on October 26, he played Shylock for the first time on the professional stage. Long years before, as an amateur in Glasgow, he had appeared as the Jew and had been fascinated by the part, which, next to Hamlet, has probably the greatest attraction of any of Shakespeare's creations for the actor.

The manager of the theatre in Buffalo and some personal friends of Mantell who had their fingers on the play-going pulse of that city strongly advised him to postpone his première in favor of some other town. Richard Mansfield and E. H. Sothern had both played Shylock there recently, and both had been disappointed in the size of the audiences. But Mantell persisted. The box-office statement proved to the doubting Thomases that Buffalo was willing to risk \$1,172.50 on the chance of his "making good" as the Jew.

"The Merchant of Venice" has been one of Mr. Mantell's most reliable drawing cards ever since. His Shylock has been greatly admired, and at least one competent critic, Robinson Locke of Toledo, has found in his interpretation a passage that he considers the supreme masterpiece of tragic

acting in a long recollection of the stage.

This is Shylock's exit at the close of the trial scene. Here Mantell introduces a piece of "stage business" of his own invention, the result of a lucky accident. Shylock one night after the trial was walking slowly off the stage in the traditional manner of utter dejection, with head bowed so low that the chin touched the breast. A new Antonio was on the stage that night, and he had blundered awkwardly into the very path of Shylock's exit, and stood there unconscious of fault.

"Get out of the way," Mantell muttered as he approached. Antonio didn't hear.

A little nearer, and "Step back," commanded Shylock, under his breath. Antonio still did not budge.

Then Mantell paused, raised his head very slowly, looked the merchant in the eye, and whispered sternly: "Get out of the way!" This time the command was effective.

But there was something else more effective still, which the tragedian perceived through that mysterious bond of sympathy that connects actor and audience. As he raised his head, he felt the audience respond to a new sensation. It was a last spasm of pride in the defeated Jew, or perhaps a reproach to the God of Israel for delivering

him over to the mercy of the Gentiles. Anyhow, there was a subtle something that Mantell had never before conveyed to an audience, and, with the instinct for dramatic effect which he possesses above all living tragedians, Mantell decided immediately to incorporate this action permanently into Shylock.

Of late years, since the vanity of the matinée idol has been submerged in the dignity of the tragedian, Mantell has not displayed himself in proper person to his audiences, except occasionally after the last act of "The Merchant of Venice." It was formerly the custom for a male star to conclude the performance of "The Merchant" with the trial scene, but Mr. Mantell has followed the lead of Irving in restoring to the comedy the picturesque last act in the garden of Belmont. During this act, in which Shylock, of course, does not appear, Mantell changes to citizen's clothing, and, at the conclusion of the play, sometimes appears for a moment in front of the curtain. Never while in the dress of a character — unless the occasion be extraordinary — does he step out of his rôle, even when responding to encores. It is Lear who bows, or Othello, or Macbeth — never Mantell. He believes the illusion is better thus sustained.

image

not

available



A MASTER OF MAKE-UP

image

not

available

wanted Shakespeare when it could get the right brand, and clearly Mantell could supply the brand.

At the conclusion of this engagement, Mantell went to Atlantic Highlands where he purchased the property he converted into "Brucewood," as already related. It was the first home he had had since he left Ireland a third of a century before. He felt for the first time in his stage career the luxurious ease and content that comes with the possession of property. Summer after summer since then he has improved and extended his estate. The most valuable extension is a supplementary estate, which was christened "Maywood," in honor of Marie Booth Russell.

Heretofore Mantell, in adding to his repertoire, had adhered closely to the dependable classics — the dramas that had been successfully presented by generation after generation of tragedians. "King Lear," the only apparent exception, was an exception only because few can play it. In the few instances of adequate performances in stage history, it has brought both fame and fortune to its interpreter.

But now Mantell and Brady decided upon a bold experiment — "King John," Shakespeare's crude chronicle play. Brady saw great possibilities in the pathetic episode of

image

not

available

by proper acting, of reconciling them all. Accordingly, he cut down the play only for the purpose of making it short enough for stage presentation under present-day conditions, leaving the order of the text exactly as Shakespeare wrote it.

It was not his first revolt against tradition. He had, for instance, restored the fool to "King Lear," omitted by most tragedians, including Edwin Booth, and he had made the fool, in a beautiful heartfelt interpretation by Guy Lindsley, a vital force in the tragedy.

Throwing all traditions of the rôle of John to the wind, Mantell set to work to develop a personage that should be new to the stage. The attention he gave to the death scene is of particular interest. Tradition declares that King John died by a slow poison administered by a monk and records a few symptoms that preceded death. Mantell gathered together everything he could find relating to the death agonies, and then submitted the whole to his family physician, Dr. Benjamin Kopf, of Brooklyn.

"There is the case, Doctor," said the actor, "now tell me exactly how a man so poisoned would die."

Dr. Kopf, who himself has made a hobby of Shakespeare, set to work as earnestly as

image

not

available

playgoers in general showed little interest. The Chicago engagement was a disappointment financially, and during the week that "King John" was presented in New York, the receipts were only \$5000, whereas the next week, when the old repertoire was repeated, they were more than doubled. It was not until Mantell took "King John" on a coast-to-coast tour during the season of 1913-14 that it proved profitable. On that trip, it almost duplicated the sensation Mantell had made in "King Lear."

It was in this play at the beginning of this tour that Ethel Mantell, the daughter of the tragedian, made her first stage appearance in a speaking part. In the previous March, during a visit to her father in Albany, the scene of his own American début, she had walked on the stage in "Julius Cæsar," but only as a young Roman girl "in the picture."

Miss Mantell's début as a real actress took place on the night of October 6, 1913, at the Alvin Theatre, Pittsburgh. She appeared as Lady Blanche. A yellow-haired girl of seventeen, fresh from a convent school, who had inherited the handsomeness of her father and the beauty of her mother, she was the fairest Lady Blanche that ever trod the stage.

Miss Mantell gave proof at the outset of

image

not

available

not be the weak, insignificant contemptible creature of tonight. For Louis was a head shorter even than the women on the stage. He didn't reach to the shoulder of the unfortunate Marie, the victim of his cruelty; and her lover, the Iago of last night, could have crushed the wretch with his foot.

This is no exaggeration, as any one who has seen the astonishing performance can testify. Mantell in the rôle of Louis apparently loses nearly a foot of his stature and reduces his weight by a hundred pounds. His hands and arms appear corded and emaciated, and his legs, encased in hosiery, seem shrunk and shrivelled. The eye cannot detect where the height and weight have gone. As Richard III, Mantell is stooped to represent the hunchback, but he is a stooping giant. No weight has disappeared. With Louis it is different. There is no hump, he is not deformed, only emaciated with age and disease.

No other man on the American stage today seems to possess this power of altering the figure noticeably. Mantell's only rival is a woman — the Russian Nazimova. She makes something of the same transition from Hedda Gabler to Nora that Mantell does from Othello to Louis, but her transformation is not nearly so pronounced.

I would tell you how Mantell does it, for

image

not

available



TWO SHARPLY-CONTRASTED FRENCH STUDIES



LIBRARY
PLATE LIBRARY

AS 44388
CHILDREN'S
R L

members of his company and the stage crew. Everybody carefully avoids blunders, and the care thus exercised consciously, is almost always productive of something that would not occur on any other night.

Here is a case in point. "*Louis XI*" ends with a death scene that rivals for dramatic intensity that of "*King John*." The scene never fails to create a creeping awe in the crowd out front, and, after the spell is broken by the descent of the curtain, encore after encore is the invariable result. Through the first of these encores, Louis retains his position of death in his chair. Sometimes, when the audience becomes insistent, Mantell arises while the curtain is down, and then appears between the folds of the velvet and makes a final bow.

On the particular night in question, the performance had gone along with marvelous smoothness. There had not been a hitch anywhere, and everybody was heaving a great sigh of relief that it was all over. Then, when it came time for Mr. Mantell to get up out of the chair, the unlucky wight at the curtain pulled it up, and revealed to the audience the process of resurrection.

Barney Turner, Mr. Mantell's stage carpenter, who was responsible for the mechanical working of the show, saw. He also



image

not

available

stage. In this new production, Marie Booth Russell made a most charming Rosalind. Rosalind and Lady Macbeth were perhaps her most perfect characterizations.

Though now supreme among American tragedians, Robert Mantell was not content. He longed for another plunge into romantic drama of the sort in which he had scored in the days when he was a matinée idol. He procured for the experiment a new comedy of Irish life, "The O'Flynn," by Justin Huntly McCarthy. Mantell was enthusiastic over the rollicking situations of the play, and he brushed to a high polish his rich Irish brogue of the Belfast days.

The attendance at the première in Pittsburgh the night of October 20, 1910, was not encouraging, but the audience seemed to be as hugely delighted as the actor, and he felt success was in his grasp. He repeated the play several times. The few who came to see it laughed uproariously, but the hordes who stayed away didn't seem to be nervously disturbed over what they were missing. Then, Mantell gave in. It was in the classics he was wanted, not in some new play, no matter how clever. He had made his own bed. He would lie in it. He felt a little as though he had forged chains for himself. He loved the classics, but

image

not

available

Pittsburgh a message to hasten home. He entered upon a race with death. Death won. Marie Booth Russell drew her last breath at 8.45 p. m. Five hours later, Mantell arrived at "Brucewood."

image

not

available

It was when he was filling an engagement at the handsome New Amsterdam Theatre, New York. There is an elevator in the theatre by which the players are conveyed from dressing room to stage, in the glory of their makeup. In those days, the elevator was in charge of a twin brother of the Ancient Mariner, a house fixture, with all the privileges of a veteran to whom even Abraham Erlanger and Marcus Klaw must show deference.

It was Othello night. Mantell was made up in all the barbaric splendor of the handsome Moor. The elevator man looked him over critically as he stepped into the car. But he held his peace, until he had put the lumbering machinery into operation. (Mantell, in the telling, gave an admirable impersonation of the tugging of the Ancient at the wire cables.) Then the old fellow remarked admiringly:

“Lud, Governor, but you look fine to-night—you look just like Lew Dockstader!”

The story, told with all Mr. Mantell’s skill of impersonation, “gets across big.”

“Another night I was playing Louis XI,” continues the actor. “I stepped into the elevator in the horrible makeup of the part, and actually startled even my iron-nerved old friend. He looked me over

image

not

available

star rôle of eatables this night. There were grapes imported from Asia at a cost of \$2.50 each. Wines stored in Parisian cellars in the days before the French Revolution, and valued by the drop instead of by the pint or quart, were served as a sort of symphonic climax to a graded series of French and Italian wines of other rare vintage. So harmoniously were they blended that not a guest quitted the banquet at 2 o'clock in the morning in a state of intoxication. Colonel Smith prided himself on being able to entertain with Epicurean lavishness, without any resultant drunkenness or indigestion.

The guests carried away with them as souvenirs the menu cards — engraved sheets of thin steel. The banquet had cost "Policy Bill" Smith \$350 a plate.

Another visitor at the Sinton is Ethel Mantell, daughter of the tragedian. She has left her father's company to follow a stage career of greater independence among strangers. She is with "The 13th Chair," which is resting during the dull week before Christmas.

Though in the seven years that have elapsed since "The O'Flynn" Robert Mantell has staged nothing new, he has not been idle. He has, indeed, put in the most useful labor of his life polishing and perfecting

image

not

available

envoy of the Mantell organization to the institutions of learning, is finding during the current season that the great universities of New England and the East, so cautious in their endorsement of anything not thoroughly tried and proven, have broken down their last barriers of restraint, and are extending to Mr. Mantell the same warmth of admiring congratulation accorded him half a dozen years ago by the less conservative Western universities. Mantell has established himself from the Atlantic to the Pacific as a classic institution. A visit by him to a center of culture has become an event comparable in dignity with a season of grand opera.

These years of the ripening of his art have been rendered golden, too, in the romantic history of the most picturesque of all the great tragedians by his long honeymoon with his young and beautiful wife and leading woman, who retains for stage purposes her maiden name of Genevieve Hamper.

Miss Hamper came into Mr. Mantell's life at his darkest hour — the hour in which he was cast into the depths of gloom and despair by the death of Marie Booth Russell, his companion and co-worker for so many years. Miss Hamper had been the protégée of Miss Russell, and, as such, had

image

not

available



MISS GENEVIEVE HAMPER

image

not

available

Prince of Wales in "Richard III," and to report for duty in Chicago the next week.

It was in Chicago, accordingly, on Thanksgiving afternoon, November 24, 1910, that Miss Hamper made her *début*. Her matinée part was Jessica, and Thanksgiving night she played the little princely nephew of the ogreish Richard. The following night she appeared as Cordelia, the most tenderly sympathetic of all Shakespeare's heroines, and this rôle, alone, of those she first played, she has kept ever since. Her quick and gratifying display of talent made her a favorite with Mr. and Mrs. Mantell and they took her under their immediate protection.

After two years of striving with the numberless difficulties of the classic art, Mr. Mantell gave Miss Hamper her first chance to appear as his leading woman. During the course of a May week in Ottawa in 1912, she played Ophelia. She gave a performance that surprised even the veteran tragedian, who had so constantly and conscientiously believed in her. She chanted the mad scene in a plaintive, unearthly tone that robbed it of the physical morbidness so hard to avoid in the acting of this passage, bringing out all the magic of Shakespeare's poetry, and holding her audience enthralled.

image

not

available

as a pillar of foam melting into itself. She has solved one of the most difficult of stage problems, the problem of falling without awkwardness, without making the audience wonder if the player is really hurt, and without detracting from the illusion of death by a too-obvious care not to break a bone.

Miss Hamper's development on the foundation of a grace and beauty as rare in a feminine physique as her intense ambition to act is common in a feminine heart, has been along lines of Mr. Mantell's own sketching. He got hold of her before she had been spoiled by any previous training — before she had learned the thousand and one things necessary to unlearn before the player of the modern type can be developed into a classicist. From his own long stage experience, Mr. Mantell has evolved a set of ideas as to what a Shakespearean actress should be like, and, with the art of another Svengali, though with love as the potent factor instead of hypnotic suggestion, he is visualizing his ideas in a new *Trilby*, who is not, however, the empty automaton that was the old. Miss Hamper, by hard and conscientious study and constant rehearsal, has developed in seven years from one of a mob of stage-struck girls "crazy" to go on as an unprogrammed bit of a stage picture into the accepted and acceptable leading

image

not

available

appearance in a speaking part. The play was "King John." Miss Hamper appeared as the persecuted Prince Arthur and Miss Mantell as Lady Blanche.

The "King John" tour was a gratifying success from coast to Coast. (No, 'tis not a printer's error—that setting up of the first "coast" with a lower-case letter, and the second with a capital. For, on this very tour with Mantell, I was instructed by a patriotic stenographer in San Francisco, which was then in preparation for the great Exposition, that "coast to Coast" must be so written, and not otherwise. It is another case of city speaking jealously to city, or section to section, after the manner of Kipling and O. Henry.) This prosperous tour was made in the last normal theatrical season the civilized world has known to date.

For, in the succeeding summer of 1914, the World War broke out. Mantell, with many misgivings, remembering the hardships that attended the Spanish-American War, though with a cheerfulness resembling that of his elderly sister residing in Holland, opened his new season in Atlantic City.

First, a word about the sister in Holland. She, a woman well past fourscore, wrote her "kid brother" shortly after the German invasion of Belgium just across the Dutch



image

not

available

which, though directly involved in the war, was cooler-headed than New York. An excellent week in Toronto followed.

The company then recrossed the border into the United States. By this time, financial America was beginning to regain its equilibrium, though still dizzy from the bludgeon stroke of war. Good, bad and indifferent weeks followed each other in crazy procession. This kept up until the vacation period, which, usually in all seasons, including the best, is the dull two weeks before Christmas. Mantell closed for the vacation in Washington even with the board, and with the proud distinction of being one of the very few theatrical attractions that had been able to weather the storm. Nearly everything sent out from New York had closed with unseemly haste.

A pleasant incident of the week in Washington was a social call paid the tragedian by William Jennings Bryan, then Secretary of State. Mr. Bryan, after witnessing a performance of "Hamlet," asked to be conducted back scenes, and there, in the star's dressing room, congratulated him warmly on the excellence of his acting.

Mr. Mantell resumed his tour in Boston Christmas week. Business gradually became better and more stable with the return of financial confidence, and the remainder

image

not

available

ROBERT MANTELL'S ROMANCE

But the screen engagement was predictive of a very agreeable sojourn in Jan whither Mr. Fox sent his classic star w director who was assisting likewise in making there of the Annette Keller water pictures. Mr. Mantell and Hamper, who was also included in the contract on a handsome salary, found people of Jamaica hospitable to a de and they thoroughly enjoyed the con and luxuries of the island.

Miss Hamper, with her big brown and black hair, just escaped being developed by the Fox studios into an Theda Bara. "Here we have labore these years to keep you sweet and gei said Miss Genevieve Reynolds, the st Queen Mother of Hamlet, to Mrs. Ma after seeing one of her pictures, "and almost went and converted yourself in vampire when our backs were turned!

The picture engagement was prolo into the early days of 1916, the Shakes ean Tercentenary year. Mr. Mantell considered a number of elaborate plan the celebration of the great annive among them a tour of the English-spe world, including Australia, India, & Africa and England itself. But the V War had intervened. All plans for a celebration, both in England and Am



discussed by classic stars for a score of years, had to be abandoned, and the celebrations dwindled into scattered local fêtes.

Mr. Mantell's contribution was a modest one. He and Margaret Anglin, under the direction of James Shesgreen, and on invitation of a community organization in St. Louis, staged a great open-air production of "As You Like It" in Forest Park. Miss Anglin was the Rosalind, and Mr. Mantell gave his first and last performance of the striking rôle of the melancholy Jacques. Frederick Lewis played Orlando and Miss Hamper, Phœbe. The engagement extended through two weeks in May, and, in spite of being partially marred by rain, attracted huge crowds. A feature was a community prologue preceding the play, in which some twelve or fifteen hundred young people of St. Louis engaged in old English folk dances on the enormous rustic stage representing the Forest of Arden.

After a prolonged rest at Atlantic Highlands, Mr. Mantell returned to the legitimate stage in the early part of November. The opening week in Montreal was signalized by the first appearance of Miss Hamper as Lady Macbeth. Miss Hamper, who is of slight and elegant physique, had shunned heretofore the rôle of Lady Macbeth, the most mature and difficult of Shakespeare's

heroines, leaving her for an actress in the company of the type known in repertoire companies as the "heavy woman." Miss Florence Auer, who had last filled this position with the Mantell organization, and who was re-engaged for the season about to open, notified Mr. Mantell she would be unable to join him for two weeks, since she was playing with a company that had opened earlier.

Mr. Mantell decided, in consequence, to entrust *Lady Macbeth* to Miss Hamper. After four "intensive" rehearsals, the youthful Mrs. Mantell went on in Montreal and "made good." Her *Lady Macbeth*, for which Mr. Mantell had feared because of her slight physique, gained in power and intensity as the season proceeded, and only a few weeks ago, in the present autumn of 1917, it stood successfully the acid test of Boston. One critic, Miss Salita Solano, sometimes called "the female Alan Dale" from the caustic qualities of her pen (or is it a typewriter?) was especially generous with her praise.

The season of Mantell's return to the legitimate stage was again spent east of the Mississippi River for the most part, the tour extending no farther west than Minneapolis. An interesting incident of the season was the engagement by Mr. Mantell of his

old friend, James B. Dickson, as company manager. Mr. Dickson was the partner of the late Joseph Brooks in the old firm of Brooks & Dickson, who, back in 1882, as owners of "The World" and "The Romany Rye," presented Mantell for the first time in America as a leading man. This firm, too, is credited with having originated the plan of a circuit of theatres booked from a central office that afterward developed into the Klaw & Erlanger syndicate.

Mr. Dickson, who continues to date as Mr. Mantell's manager, numbers among his favorite stories one that concerns John Stetson, who brought Mantell to America in 1882 to head a Shakespearean company he intended to install in Booth's Theatre, New York, which he had just taken over after Edwin Booth had met with financial reverses, and which he was determined to run as a classic playhouse in rivalry of Booth himself. Stetson, who was noted for his showmanship more than for his Latin education, had suffered severely from seasickness on his return voyage to America, after signing in England the contract with Mantell. It had been his first trip abroad. Stepping ashore, he announced firmly to some friends that nevermore would he take his feet off "terra cotta!" It was the failure of Stetson to put through his plan for a

Shakespearean stock company in Booth's Theatre that led to the transfer of his contract with Mantell to the firm of Brooks & Dickson.

In Albany in the February of this season, Mrs. Mantell gave her husband a birthday dinner. William Winter was the guest of honor. In spite of his extreme age and weak condition, the great critic came with his son, Jefferson, from New York to Albany, the city of Mantell's American début forty years ago. It was a little select party of intimate spirits. Until almost the dawn of the morning, the aged Mr. Winter entertained the company with reminiscences of the stage in the days when classic acting was in flower. Mantell, whom he always regarded with a fatherly love, he complimented lavishly as a kindred soul to the great tragedians that had passed into the dim Beyond. He recalled the Ophelias of the past, and placed beside them Miss Hamper, who had touched him to tears with her performance of the gentle sweetheart of Hamlet.

"Bob, I wept — I couldn't help it," he told Mantell.

It was William Winter's last social engagement — the last of hundreds filled by the best lover of the stage America has ever had, with the brilliant stars that have

adorned the theatre — Booth, Forrest, Irving, Mary Anderson, Charlotte Cushman, and the rest. They all knew him intimately, and they loved him as he loved them. Only a few months after the Albany dinner, Mr. Winter died. Mr. Mantell was at his bedside four days before the end came, but the critic was too far on his journey into the penumbral shadows of death to recognize his friend, who always to him was a mere youngster.

The present season of 1917-18 began in Boston on the night of September 17. An amusing "piece of business" was injected, with characteristic resourcefulness, into "Richard III" on the Saturday night of the opening week. It was the first performance of "Richard" of the season, and was peculiarly buoyant and electrifying, being above the average of even Mantell's always admirable characterization of the Duke of Gloster. As the tragedian entered a scene toward the middle of the play, he was struck all of a sudden by the knowledge that he had "gone up in his lines." There was nobody in the wings at his side to prompt him, and, as he had the stage all to himself, there was nobody there either to "hand him the cue." He shambled briskly along, muttering to himself and looking up into the trees that constituted the scenery

at the rear. It was a refreshing moment to all of us out front familiar with the "business" of the play, but who had never seen this before, and to the audience in general, which was delighted with Richard's mumbled cogitations, fitted with admirable humor by Mantell into the character of the satiric hunchback. When the Duke of Gloster got to the center of the stage, he began speaking correctly the lines of Shakespeare!

I'm going to let that Boston audience now into a secret Mr. Mantell imparted to me at rehearsal next day. Here's what Richard was muttering:

"Oh, the devil, what do I say here!
What do I say here!"

It was not until the actor had looked carefully at the scenery and got into the center of the old familiar stage setting that the lines came back to him automatically.

For several seasons past, Mr. Mantell had been playing under the direction of Mr. Brady on a verbal agreement, their formal contract, drawn up on the triumphant re-entry of the tragedian into New York after his long exile, having expired. On November 10 in this present season in Trenton, N. J., they parted company. The separation was amicable. Brady, as presi-

dent of the World Film Corporation, had become one of the biggest national factors in the motion picture industry, and in late years had devoted less and less of his time to the legitimate stage. Mantell had become comparatively independent in fortune. Both concluded it would be best for their mutual interests to separate. The tragedian is now touring under his own management.

In the "progress" through New England and the Middle West, incidents have transpired whose culling could serve for an indefinite prolongation of this farewell chapter Number Twenty-Three. But if I have not told enough in all these pages to convince you that Robert Mantell (who insists that his name be put in the electric lights "Robert B. Mantell," in order that the thirteen letters in "Robert Mantell" scare not away prospective customers), is a human being "even as you and I," and not solely an artistic freak of nature, then the task must be given over as hopeless in my hands.

Let me pass then to the last scene of all, which ends, for the nonce, this strange, eventful history.

A new Robert Bruce Mantell has made his appearance, the son of the present Mrs. Mantell. He was born at the summer home



THE TWO ROBERT BRUCE MANTELLS



image

not

available

of Mr. Brady at Allenhurst, a few miles down the Jersey coast from Atlantic Highlands, September 2, 1912, during the summer rehearsals. Mr. Mantell, called from rehearsal room, heard the cry before he saw the child.

"It's a man," he said: "no woman ever had a voice like that!"

Then, after gazing at the sturdy youngster, he added: "I'm going to make a tragedian of him. He's to be the great Mantell!"

Robert Bruce Mantell, Jr., made his "stage début" on the afternoon of March 11, 1914, in Indianapolis, at the handsome Murat Theatre, where three years later, November 21, 1917, his mother, as Juliet, made her first appearance as a "featured" actress. His father carried him onto the stage at the fall of the final curtain on "The Merchant of Venice." The two Robert Bruce Mantells appeared between the folds of the maroon plush and took a call together. The younger Mantell waved his tiny hand to the applauding audience.

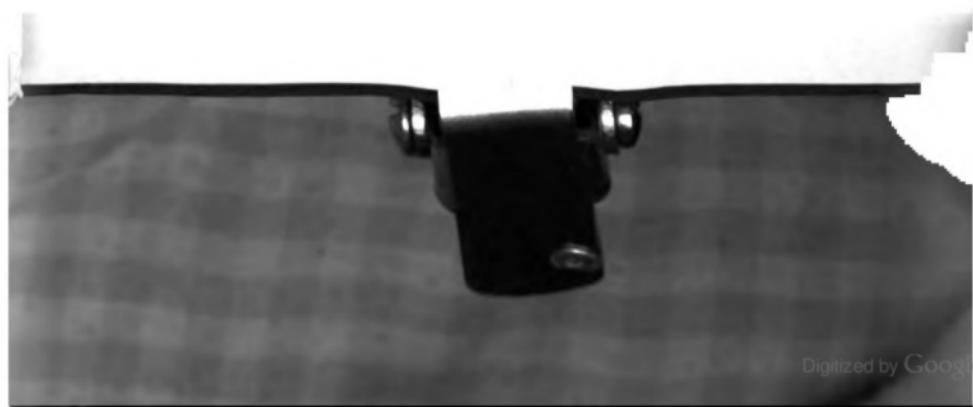
Robert Bruce Mantell, Sr., has autographed a photograph of himself to Robert Bruce Mantell, Jr. A doubtful meaning in the inscription, resulting from the omission of a punctuation mark, was not intended at the time, but the elder Mantell, after



the discovery of the joke, allowed it to stand:

To My Dear Little Son Bruce
God Protect Him Always
From His Loving Father.

HERE ENDS THE RECORD OF AN
UNENDED CAREER.



image

not

available